RCSA

RECRUITMENT & CONSULTING
SERVICES ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

A Survey of Attitudes towards Older Workers

November 2015

Executive Summary

This survey was undertaken by Colleen Chen for the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association (RCSA). It is an update to 'A Survey of Attitudes towards Older Workers', initially conducted in 2005 to explore the unique relationship and influence that a recruitment company has in HR design and employment practices with clients to facilitate workplace participation of older and disabled workers.

Overall, older workers are perceived to have positive attitudes, good life experience, and are more reliable compared to younger workers. Older workers are not more expensive to employ and do not want to work less hours.

Age is not the strongest predictor of ability or productivity. In the context of an ageing population, clients are found to be more willing to adapt to the recruitment and employment of older workers in roles in which they have traditionally favoured younger workers. This has also been true in areas whereby there has been a skill shortage.

On the other hand, where industries are encountering rapid change, clients are inclined to hire on potential and seek transferrable skills from younger candidates. On an individual firm level, where directors of companies are near retirement and are looking to sell their business, they have also tended to favour the recruitment younger employees to train them in order to pass it on.

Risk of injury when performing manual labour remains one common concern for recruiters when considering older workers for physically-demanding positions.

The recruitment sector has always been focused on sourcing the best candidate based on productivity and capability. Recruiters believe that many attributes relating to older workers should not be generalised and largely depends on the attributes and attitude on the part of the individual.

While many recruiters believe that older workers could be good mentors for younger workers, some believe that mentoring is a function of an individual's profile and not necessarily dependent on age even though individual experience can affect that capability.

Likewise, while some recruiters agreed with the view that older workers are keen to learn new skills, most recruiters felt ambivalent about the statement because they believed that skills should not be generalised. On the same token, while employers are more concerned about the IT skills of older workers, recruiters saw it on the basis of an individual's capability. Some recruiters saw younger worker as capable of having low IT literacy when certain older people can have high IT literacy.

While employer had a view that older workers had more health concerns than younger workers, recruiters were of the view that health concerns are a function of genetics and lifestyle, and should not be generalised. Anecdotally, older workers are seen as taking less sick days than younger workers as there are fewer distractions.

Recruiters acknowledge that some industries are prone to a younger demographic, presenting a challenge for placing older workers.

Industries in the creative and technology sector tend to give preference to younger workers in order to align their workforce with their target market and audience. Recruiters claim that it is particularly difficult to convince employers to consider an older worker if the employer already have a pre-existing idea of the ideal employee in order build a particular brand or workplace culture. Almost half of recruiters indicate their clients as having sometimes or often commented that older workers do not fit into a modern workplace culture. Recruiters also note that clients are often not seeking a scattering of workers but are focused on finding a particular type of worker.

In other instances, recruiters note that start-ups and emerging sectors are also drawn to younger workers because the role often demands skills taught at a university-level and has only come into existence within the past five years. Even where the older worker has studied IT in their formative years, recruiters have noted that IT was very different in 1980s and 1990s than it is today. Start-ups will also tend to choose employees who have less financial outlay and are more receptive to risk.

On the other hand, recruiters are aware of some industries that favour older workers. In the early childhood education sector for instance, parents like having an older worker because they are seen as being more reliable. Executive placements also usually favour older workers as they need the necessary experience for senior management. This is particularly true in industries that are not tolerant of mistakes. In the construction industry in the ACT where employers can be charged for manslaughter if an employee is killed on site, greater emphasis is placed on the recruitment of workers with skill, experience and reliability.

Recruiters also believe that older workers tend to have more insulation in the workplace if the position was registration and skills based as in the health and medical sector. Industries that are most accessible to older workers will also be ones where the role is not changing too much as a result of technological change.

There has been a greater willingness to hire older workers in the recruitment sector, however some have noted that new technologies used in the recruitment process can become barriers for older workers with low IT skills. The recruitment industry is no longer just business development and writing job advertisements, but also involves a heavy use of social media and other software technologies.

Likewise, e-recruitment has been cited as a potential barrier for older workers, as recruiters increasingly rely on software to conduct initial screening of candidates.

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Introduction

This survey was undertaken by Colleen Chen for the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association (RCSA) as an update to 'A Survey of Attitudes towards Older Workers' conducted in 2005.

The survey was designed to identify perceived employer attitudes to older workers, assess recruitment industry views on age management needs in industry, and identify current industry practices. The survey was initiated by the RCSA in 2005 because no comprehensive survey had previously been conducted on these issues in the recruitment sector.

The objectives of the consultations included the following:

- Gain an understanding of attitudes of older workers in the recruitment sector.
- Gain insight into employer attitudes to older workers.
- Identify perceived advantages of older workers.
- Identify any barriers to the employment of older workers.
- Identify any current programs on age management.
- Identify recruitment industry suggestions on future programs.
- Identify how the recruitment sector perceives its future role.

In addition, the survey included questions on the opportunities and barriers to hiring disabled workers:

- Identify any barriers to the employment of disabled workers
- Identify ways in which recruitment sector has assisted in the employment of disabled workers

The 2015 survey continues to explore the unique relationship and influence that a recruitment company has in HR design and employment practices with clients to facilitate workplace participation of older and disabled workers. The research draws upon existing experience of the recruitment sector by sampling views of senior managers in the recruitment industry.

Survey Methodology

2.1 The Consultations

The consultations were designed to provide a foundation of information of the recruitment sector's view on opportunities and barriers to the attraction, development and retention of older workers.

2.2 The Survey

The research was conducted using two integrated methodologies:

- Telephone interview (45 minutes)
- Online survey and telephone interview (15 minutes).

Telephone interview (45 minutes)

- Senior manager listed in the RCSA database was contacted by telephone, the survey was explained and an interview time was arranged over the period of September 2015 and October 2015.
- A telephone interview was conducted at the arranged time. Interviews were conducted by the independent researcher.
- Interviews typically lasted 45 minutes. Recruiters were taken through the fixed response questions and were probed on the open-ended questions.
- Following completion of the interviews, all responses were coded and entered into a database.

Online survey and telephone interview (15 minutes)

- An online survey with RCSA members was conducted in October 2015.
- The online questionnaire approach was deemed the most appropriate to supplement the qualitative research by reaching senior managers targeted by the survey who were otherwise unable to complete a phone interview.
- Follow up phone calls were made to probe on the open-ended questions.
- Following completion of the survey, all responses were coded and entered into a database.

2.3 The questionnaire

The questionnaire used for the interview is included in Appendix C. It comprises a combination of fixed choice questions and some open-ended questions. It covered the following major areas:

- Characteristics of the surveyed company
- Demographics of the person interviewed
- Older workers and the recruitment sector
- Experience with placement of older workers
- Attitudes of recruiters to older workers
- Attitudes of employers to older workers
- Barriers to hiring older workers
- Industry willingness to hire older workers
- Identification of programs for older workers
- Future role of recruitment sector in programs for older workers
- Perceived workforce expectations of different age groups

In addition to looking at the older workers, the questionnaire also included questions around disabled workers and the challenges or opportunities they encounter when seeking work. It covered the following areas:

- Awareness of assistance available to supporting the recruitment of workers with disability
- Experience with placement of workers with disability

2.4 Profile of Recruiters

The survey was national and involved 26 senior managers in recruitment companies that were members of the RCSA.

The sample frame was constructed to ensure that it covered: small, medium and large companies; and that all states and territories were included. The following table shows the number of companies surveyed by state.

Table 1. Surveyed Recruitment Companies by State

State	No. (N = 44)	Percent
NSW	20	45.45%
Vic	7	15.91%
SA	5	11.36%
Qld	7	15.91%
ACT	1	2.27%
Tas	0	0.00%
NT	0	0.00%
WA	4	9.09%

Table 2. Surveyed Recruitment Companies by Number of Employees at Branch

Number of Employees at current Branch	No. (N = 44)	Percent
<10	12	27.27%
10 to 29	20	45.45%
30 to 49	2	4.54 %
50+	10	22.73 %

Table 3. Surveyed Recruitment Companies by Number of Branches

Number of Branches	No. (N = 44)	Percent
<5	34	77.27%
6 to 15	6	13.64%
16 to 25	2	4.54%
26+	2	4.54%

Results of the Survey

3.1 Recruiter Perceptions of Older Workers

The following outlines the results on responses on recruiter perceptions of older workers

3.1.1 The Age of Older Workers

Most recruiters regarded older workers as being people aged 50 years old or above. The result has been consistent with the outcomes of the 2005 survey whereby most recruiters regarded older workers as being people aged 50 years or above.

There has been an increase of recruiters who regarded older workers as being people aged 60 years or above, and a decrease of recruiters who regarded older workers as being 40 years or above.

Overall, the realities of an ageing workforce as well as the rise in public awareness campaigns around older workers were cited as primary reasons for any changes in opinion regarding the age of the older worker.

Table 3. Age that Recruiters Defined a person as an Older Worker

Older Workers Age	No. (N= 40)	Percent – 2015
40+	1	2.50%
45+	6	15.00 %
50+	17	42.50%
60+	16	40.00%

Older Workers Age	Percent – 2005
40+	4.2%
45+	12.5%
50+	64.6%
60+	18.8%

3.1.2 Skills and Experience

Recruiters were positive about older workers and believed that they have an array of positive attributes to offer future employers including good skills, life experience and the capacity to mentor younger employees. However, they were also realistic and a number saw some older workers as lacking in IT skills as well as possessing outdated skills. Meanwhile, some recruiters maintained that skills should not be generalised in that some younger people are IT illiterate whereas certain older people can be at the top of their game.

While some recruiters agreed that older workers were keen to learn new skills, many felt ambivalent about the statement.

Some of the key findings were:

- 87.50% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed with the view that older workers have good skills
- 95.00% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed that older workers have more life experience to apply to decision making
- 70.00% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed that older workers are good mentors for younger employees
- 35.89% of recruiters disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that older workers had outdated skills and 15.38% agreed or strongly agreed.
- 38.46% of recruiters agreed with the view that older workers are keen to learn new skills. 53.85% recruiters felt ambivalent about the statement.
- 35.89% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed that older workers lacked IT skills while 28.20% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

3.1.3 Employee Attributes

Recruiters found older workers to have positive attributes, including being reliable, steady and loyal employees who turned over their jobs relatively infrequently. They found older workers to have positive attitudes to work, fit in well into a modern workplace culture and were no more expensive to employ than other workers.

Some described the perception that older workers as being driven by the fact that older workers often occupy senior positions and therefore are paid at the pay scale of that position.

Recruiters mostly disagreed with views that older workers were slower, difficult to train and wanted to work less hours. All recruiters surveyed disagreed with the view that older workers were not worth hiring because most planned on leaving the workforce. Some recruiters also noted that to the contrary, older workers tended to work longer hours to compensate for the negative perception and bias in the workplace.

The view that older workers had more health concerns and were not interested in career progression, were largely dismissed by recruiters as being too idiosyncratic.

Many believed that issues such as health and motivation depended largely on the attributes of the individual worker.

- 87.50% of recruiters disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that older workers were not worth hiring because most planned on leaving the workforce.
- 60.00% of recruiters disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposition that older workers are more expensive to employ.
- 75.00% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed with the view that older workers have lower turnover rates
- 69.23% of recruiters disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that older workers did not fit into a modern workplace culture.
- 70.00% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed with the view that older workers have positive attitudes to work.
- 42.50% of recruiters agreed that older workers are more prepared to do a range of different things
- 37.5% of recruiters disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that older workers had more health concerns, while 25.00% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed.
- 42.50% of recruiters disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that older workers were slower, while 27.50% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed.
- 47.50% of recruiters disagreed with the proposition that older workers are not interested in career progression, however 27.50% agreed with the proposition.
- 55.00% of recruiters disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that older workers wanted to work less hours.
- 60.00% of recruiters disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view that it was difficult to retrain older workers.

Table 4. Recruiters' Opinions on Older Workers

Opinion	Agree strongly	Percent	Agree	Percent	Neither agree or disagree	Percent	Disagree	Percent	Strongly Disagree	Percent
Older workers have good skills	13	32.50%	22	55.00%	5	12.50%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Older workers have positive attitudes to work	7	17.50%	21	52.50%	10	25.00%	2	5.00%	0	0.00%
Older workers have lower turnover rates	13	32.50%	17	42.50%	8	20.00%	2	5.00%	0	0.00%
Older workers have more life experience to apply to decision-making	14	35.00%	24	60.00%	2	5.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00
Older workers are good mentors for younger employees	8	20.00%	20	50.00%	11	27.50%	1	2.50%	0	0.00%
Older workers are keen to learn new skills	3	7.69%	12	30.77%	21	53.85%	3	7.69%	0	0.00%
Older workers have outdated skills	0	0.00%	6	15.38%	19	48.72%	13	33.33%	1	2.56%
Older workers are slower	0	0.00%	11	27.50%	12	30.00%	14	35.00%	3	7.50%
There are more health concerns with older workers	0	0.00%	10	25.00%	15	37.50%	14	35.00%	1	2.50%
Older workers are not interested in career progression	1	2.50%	10	25.00%	10	25.00%	16	40.00%	3	7.50%
Older workers want to work less hours	1	2.50%	6	15.00%	11	27.50%	20	50,00%	2	5.00%
Older workers are more prepared to do a range of different things	3	7.50%	14	35.00%	16	40.00%	7	17.50%	0	0.00%
Older workers lack IT skills	1	2.56%	13	33.33%	14	35.90%	10	25.64%	1	2.56%

Older workers do not fit into a modern workplace culture	0	0.00%	2	5.13%	10	25.64%	18	46.15%	9	23.08%
Older workers are more expensive to employ	0	0.00%	6	15.00%	10	25.00%	19	47.50%	5	12.50%
It is not worth hiring older workers because most plan on leaving the workforce	0	0.00%	1	2.50%	4	10.00%	20	50.00%	15	37.50%
It is difficult to retrain older workers	0	0.00%	6	15.00%	10	25.00%	17	42.50%	7	17.50%

3.2 Clients Perceptions of older workers

Recruiters were asked a series of questions about their client's perceptions of older workers.

3.2.1 Skills and Experience

Recruiters indicated that clients have commented favourably on older workers including that they have good skills, good life experience to apply to decision making and are good mentors for younger employees. However, the findings also indicate that clients are generally more concerned about the currency of older workers work skills than recruiters are, and are particularly troubled by older workers deficiency of IT skills.

Most clients saw the retraining of older workers as being difficult even though older workers were generally keen to learn new skills.

Some of the major findings in relation to skills and experiences were:

- 82.50% had heard clients sometimes or often comment that older workers have good skills
- 79.49% had heard clients sometimes or that older workers have more life experience to apply to decision making
- 69.23% had heard clients sometimes or often comment that older workers are good mentors for younger employees.
- 51.49% had heard clients sometimes or often comment that older workers have outdated skills.
- 63.16% had heard clients sometimes or often comment that older workers lacked IT skills.
- 58.85% had heard clients sometimes comment that older workers are keen to learn new skills.
- 50.00% had heard clients sometimes or often comment that it is difficult to retrain older workers.

3.2.2 Employee Attributes

Recruiters indicated that clients generally found older workers to be more stable employees with a lower rate of job turnover. They did not believe older workers were more expensive to employ or that they were not worth hiring because they planned to soon leave the workforce.

While recruiters indicated that clients often comment that older workers have positive attitudes to work and did not want to work less hours, clients also indicated that older workers were slower.

There was no clear majority in whether clients believed there were more health concerns with older workers or whether older workers would fit into a modern workplace.

Some of the major findings in relation to employee attributes were:

- 87.18% of recruiters indicated that clients never or rarely commented that it is not worth hiring older workers because most plan to leave the workforce in a few years.
- 66.67% of recruiters indicated that clients never or rarely commented that older workers are more expensive to employ.
- 71.79% of recruiters indicated that they had sometimes or often heard their clients comment that older workers have lower turnover rates.
- 43.59% of recruiters indicated clients had sometimes or often commented that older workers do not fit into a modern workplace culture.
- 80.00% of recruiters indicated clients had sometimes or often commented that older workers have positive attitudes to work.
- 68.87% of recruiters indicated that clients had sometimes or often commented that older workers are good mentors for younger employees.
- 38.46% of recruiters indicated that clients had sometimes or often made the comment that there are more health concerns with older workers, while 61.54% rarely or never heard that.
- 61.54.19% of recruiters indicated that clients had sometimes or often commented that older workers are slower.
- 43.59% of recruiters indicated that clients had sometimes or often commented that older workers are not interested in career progression.
- 64.10% of recruiters indicated that clients had rarely or never commented that older workers want to work less hours.

Table 5. Clients' attitudes on Older Workers

Opinion	Never	Percent	Rarely	Percent	Sometimes	Percent	Often	Percent
Older workers have good skills	3	7.50%	4	10.00%	20	50.00%	13	32.50%
Older workers have positive attitudes to work	5	12.50%	3	7.50%	22	55.00%	10	25.00%
Older workers have lower turnover rates	6	15.38%	5	12.82%	18	46.15%	10	25.64%
Older workers have more life experience to apply to decision-making	4	10.26%	4	10.26%	16	41.03%	15	38.46%
Older workers are good mentors for younger employees	4	10.26%	4	20.51%	19	48.72%	5	20.51%
Older workers are keen to learn new skills	7	17.95%	11	28.21%	21	53.85%	0	0.00%
Older workers have outdated skills	9	23.08%	10	25.64%	16	41.03%	4	10.26%
Older workers are slower	7	17.95%	8	20.51%	20	51.28%	4	10.26%
There are more health concerns with older workers	10	25.64%	14	35.90%	13	33.33%	2	5.13%
Older workers are not interested in career progression	11	28.21%	11	28.21%	15	38.46%	2	5.13%
Older workers want to work less hours	13	33.33%	12	30.77%	13	33.33%	1	2.56%
Older workers are more prepared to do a range of different things	9	23.08%	10	25.64%	18	46.15%	2	5.13%
Older workers lack IT skills	5	13.16%	9	23.68%	19	50.00%	5	13.16%
Older workers do not fit into a modern workplace culture	13	33.33%	9	23.08%	11	28.21%	6	15.38%

Older workers are more expensive to employ	10	25.64%	18	41.03%	11	28.21%	2	5.13%
It is not worth hiring older workers because most plan on leaving the workforce	23	58.97%	11	28.21%	4	10.26%	1	2.56%
It is difficult to retrain older workers	11	28.95%	8	21.05%	14	36.84%	5	13.16%

3.3 Workforce Expectations Depending on Age

Recruiters identified a range of characteristics that were broadly applicable tot specific age groups. It should be noted however, that recruiters found that generalisations about age groups could be difficult as employees from all age groups may have characteristics that were atypical of their cohort.

Workers in their 50s are generally well regarded by recruiters as being good workers with positive attributes. They hold leadership positions and are consulted for their experience and wisdom. They are not resigned but continue to seek new challenges as they plan toward retirement.

Age group	Workforce Expectation
20's	- Care about lifestyle and job satisfaction - Flexible, skilful, keen to learn, open to new ideas - Technologically-aware but communication-poor - Fun, enthusiastic, excited, laidback - Bright-eyed and busy-tailed, indulgent with goals - Ambitious, confident, selfish - Naïve, lazy and unmotivated - Not as careful with analysing information, clumsy - Lack work ethic and loyalty, expect everything for nothing
30's	- Driven, motivated and ambitious - Looking for challenges, getting ahead - Seeking opportunity for career development, advanced learning and further training - More experience and more qualified - Care about money, career and job satisfaction - Dedicated, stable and confident - Young families, need extended time off for childcare
40's	- Credible, stable, reliable - Maximising earning potential - Busy, punctual, focused - Mindful, cautious, supervisory - Knowledgeable, measured, experienced - Set in their ways, efficient in their niche - Young family, looking to diversify - Not as energetic - Leadership skills
50's	- Want flexibility and security - Smart, experienced, wise - Leadership

	• Reliable, grounded, • Pragmatic, set in their ways • Want a challenge using existing experience • Self-assured, supportive

3.4 Existence of Employment Barriers

A third of recruiters currently experience barriers or hesitation in placing older workers, citing primarily employee-related barriers.

Employee-related barriers refer to the characteristic(s) of an employee that affects their work placement potential. Physical attributes of older workers were cited as restricting their capacity to effectively perform a job, especially where it related to the undertaking of heavy manual labour, requirements of good vision or dexterity, and roles involving long shifts.

One respondent presented an instance of the difficulty of trying to place an older worker in a traffic control role if the worker would need to be standing up for 10 hours a day, jumping around vehicles.

Employer-related barriers cited by recruiters referred to certain industries giving preference to younger workers in order to align their workforce with their target market and audience. Recruiters claimed that it was particularly difficult to convince employers to consider an older worker if the employer already had a pre-existing idea of the ideal employee in order build a particular brand or workplace culture. Recruiters also noted that employers were often not seeking a scattering of workers but were focused on finding a particular type of worker.

In other instances, recruiters noted that some nascent parts of the IT sector were also drawn to younger workers because the role often demanded skills taught at a university-level and has only come into existence within the past five years.

Table 6. Recruiters currently experiencing barriers or hesitation in placing older workers

	No. (N=21)	Percent
Yes	7	33.33%
No	14	66.67%

3.4.1 Job descriptions

Recruiters indicated that job descriptions presented by clients at times gave rise to connotations associated with age, personality and physical capabilities.

Examples include placing emphasis on social elements of the job that would be geared towards the interests of younger workers e.g. "drinks on Friday nights", "high energetic environment" and "funky office". Others include an emphasis on notions of "building a long term career" or seeking "someone who can grow and develop".

Other recruiters disagreed that glossy job descriptions served to discriminate against older workers, citing instead that it served as a trade-off to other aspects of the job such as a lower salary.

Table 7. Job descriptions provided by clients containing words with connotations specific to age, personality or physical capability.

Description	Never	Percent	Rarely	Percent	Sometimes	Percent	Often	Percent
Age	14	36.84%	8	21.05%	11	28.95%	5	13.16%
Personality	7	18.42%	9	23.68%	11	28.95%	11	28.95%
Physical Capability	8	21.05%	9	23.68%	15	39.47%	6	15.79%

3.4.2 Recruitment format

The changing nature of recruitment has been cited as a potential barrier for older workers. Recruitment is ongoing and recruiters seek to align the five basic variables of location, skills, opportunity, compensation and availability to all candidates available in the job market – including those in the hidden job market.

To do so, recruiters often employ Boolean search, relying on key words as well as the frequency of the candidate's online activity to detect a potential match from a large pool of candidates. Candidates that do not configure their profiles to align with key competencies or present their applications in a proper electronic format compatible with the search software often do not make it past the screening stage.

Where it is common for job search practices by older worker to be reactive, they are already in a sense one step behind when they begin seeking new work as the current role ends.

3.5 Change in Clients Receptiveness to Older Workers

In general, recruiters believed that employers are now becoming more receptive to hiring older workers, citing greater awareness of positive qualities of older workers such as reliability, stability and maturity.

Skills shortage and ageing population have also driven employers to become more receptive to hiring older workers.

Table 8. Employers receptiveness to hiring older workers

	No. (N=39)	Percent
More	18	46.15%
No change	18	46.15%
Less	3	7.69%

3.6 Change in Recruitment Industry Receptiveness to Hiring Older Workers

3.6.1 As Recruiters

On the contrary, others have noted that the role of the recruitment consultant is consistently changing, meaning that new technologies used in the recruitment process and become barriers for older workers. The recruitment industry is no longer just business development and writing job advertisements, but also involves a heavy use of digital media, social media, marketing and other software technologies such as system-based and processes-reporting.

Table Recruitment industry receptiveness to hiring older workers as recruiters

	No. (N=26)	Percent
More	12	57.14%
No change	4	19.05%
Less	5	23.81%

Almost a third of recruitment companies had no employees aged 45-55 while over a third of recruitment companies had no employees aged 55 or above.

Table 9. Surveyed Recruitment Companies by Number of Employees aged 45-55 at Branch

Percentage of Employees aged 45-55 years old at Branch	No. (N = 44)	Percent
0	22	50.00%
<10%	3	6.81 %
10% to 20%	4	9.09%
20% to 30%	6	13.64%
30% to 50%	7	15.90%
50%+	2	4.54%

Table 10. Surveyed Recruitment Companies by Number of Employees aged over 55 at Branch

Percentage of Employees aged over 55 years old at Branch	No. (N = 43)	Percent
0	23	53.49%
<10%	8	18.60%
10% to 20%	5	11.63%
20% to 30%	2	4.65%
30% to 50%	3	6.97%
50%+	2	4.65%

3.6.2 As On-Hire Employees

Over a third of recruiters regarded the recruitment industry as becoming more receptive to hiring older workers as on-hire employees. The key reason for recruiters becoming more receptive to older workers in on hire roles was that the good qualities of older workers, such as reliability and work ethic, were being recognised in light of the difficulties associated with employing younger workers.

However, over half of recruited cited no change and those who believed that the recruitment industry has become less receptive to hiring older workers as on-hire employees have cited adaptability of younger workers and particular culture-fitting goals of clients as being key barriers to placing older workers.

Some recruiters also cited that the risk of injury for an older worker in labour-intensives jobs continues to be a barrier to placing older workers.

Table 11. Recruitment industry receptiveness to hiring older workers as on-hire employees.

	No. (N=38)	Percent
More	11	31.43%
No change	22	62.86%
Less	2	5.71%

3.7 Impacts of Skills Shortages

Over 75% recruiters indicated that recognition of skills shortage was making clients more receptive to hiring older workers. Out of necessity, clients become more willing to re-examine previously held belief and attitudes about older workers.

Table 12. Skill shortages making clients more receptive to hiring older workers

	No. (N=38)	Percent
Yes	29	76.32%
No	9	23.68%

3.8 Incidence of Company Programs

On the whole, it is rare for recruiters to have programs in place to manage older workers in the workforce, either for company employees or for on-hire employees.

Particular assistance to older workers and workers with disabilities occurs on a more ad hoc basis where a recruiter will endeavour to facilitate some assistance if an opportunity becomes available for them to intervene during the placement process.

In one instance, a recruiter placed an 82-year-old telecommunications engineer into a team full of young workers. The applicant was a well sought after and experienced bridge engineer. Due to the seniority of his position, he served as a mentor on the team and the role was less reliant on technology as it was focused on design reviews.

In another instance, one recruiter successfully placed a candidate with hearing impairment by setting up the interview with the assistance of the phone company such that the hearing impairment could be overcome during the teleconference interview process.

3.9 The Role of Recruiters in Managing Older Workers and Workers with Disabilities

Recruiters see themselves as having an educative role to play with employees or an advisory counselling role. A third of recruiters have had experience assisting clients in building capacity to support the productive employment of older workers or workers with disability

Some recruiters have assisted clients by working closely with them to build confidence in clients to hire workers with particular disabilities. This includes clear communication regarding the skills match of the worker and their realistic limitation, and ensuring that the job interview and induction process is not a barrier in itself.

In one instance, a recruiter placed a worker with one leg in a factory job because it was a job that required dexterity and not hard manual labour. In another instance, a candidate was not hired because even though the client agreed to take him on, the room hosting the induction session had no wheelchair access and due to the seasonal nature of the role, the position was soon filled by another candidate.

Recruiters have also cited structural barriers in some industries such as health and medical whereby it is unrealistic to place disabled nurse and patients exhibit a strong bias against being treated by a disabled doctor.

Table 13. Recruiters have assisted clients in building capacity to support the productive employment of older workers or workers with disability.

	No. (N=35)	Percent
Yes	11	31.438%
No	24	68.57%

3.10 Client Awareness of the employment needs of Workers with Disabilities

Recruiters indicated that clients had a general understanding of the employment needs of workers with disability but were less aware of the availability of assistance to support the hiring of disabled workers.

Some of the major findings in relation to employer awareness of recruitment needs of staff with disability were:

- 66.67% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed with the view that employers generally don't know what support a person with disability would require, and the extent to which they need to provide this support.
- 79.49% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed with the view that employers do not know how much it would cost, and whether funding is available to assist in the hiring of a disabled person.
- 53.84% of recruiters agreed or strongly agreed with the view that employers fear the risk of performing acts towards a disabled employee in the workplace that would result in a discriminatory legal action, while 23.08% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the view

Table 14. Recruiters' attitudes on client knowledge of hiring worker with disability

Opinion	Agree Strongly	Percent	Agree	Percent	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Percent	Disagree	Percent	Strongly Disagree	Percent
Employers generally don't know what support a person with disability would require, and the extent to which they need to provide this support.	10	25.64%	16	41.03%	11	28.21%	1	2.56%	1	2.56%
Employers do not know how much it would cost, and whether funding is available to assist in the hiring of a disabled person.	10	25.64%	21	53.85%	7	17.95%	0	0.00%	1	2.56%
Employers fear the risk of performing acts towards a disabled employee in the workplace that would result in a discriminatory legal action.	3	7.69%	18	46.15%	9	23.08%	7	17.95%	2	5.13%

4 Key Issues and Directions

4.1 Employment of Older Workers

The findings of the survey indicate that skills and experience can make a significant difference in the capacity of an older worker to secure work. Recruiters believe that older workers tend to have more insulation in the workplace if the position was registration and skills based.

Perceived deficiency in IT skills remains a major barrier to the employment of older workers. Poor IT skills not only highlight the reluctance of clients to hire older workers, but also suggests limited ability for older workers to develop current job search techniques in order to find suitable employment. To advance their potential for job placement, the results suggest that older workers should actively acquire work and IT skills in a manner that is adapted for the learning style of older workers.

While there has been an overall increased awareness of the positive attributes of older workers, some industries remain structurally geared towards hiring younger employees.[1] They include strong performance-based sectors such as finance and insurance, and sectors where a youthful and playful image is important. Developing a culture of life-long learning can help mitigate the perception that older workers do not fit within a modern workplace culture.

Meanwhile, industries that are most accessible to older workers are the ones where the role is not changing too much as a result of technological change, and where reliability and experience is put at the highest priority.

[1] One in ten business respondents have an age above which they will not recruit – the average age is 50 years. Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) Fact or fiction? Stereotypes of older Australians Report

4.2 Education of Employers

Employers are becoming more receptive to hiring older workers. Some recognise that ageing may have differential effects on productivity across different industries. This has been driven by push factors such as skills shortage and an ageing population, as well as a greater awareness of positive qualities of older workers such as reliability, stability and maturity.

While positive characteristics of older workers stand in contrast to the difficulties associated with employing younger workers, challenges remain where employer already have a pre-existing idea of the ideal employee in order build a particular brand or workplace culture. Recruiters can take on an educative role by working with clients to remedy generalisations about what an older worker is like and is capable of. However, the challenges will remain if older Australians continue to be underrepresented and poorly portrayed in the media.

Physical characteristics associated with older workers are often generalized and could restrict older workers from undertaking heavy manual labour, long shifts, and roles that require good vision or dexterity. Recruiters can assist older workers in identifying their capacity for work to ensure that they are not unnecessarily excluded from jobs purely on the basis of generalised perceptions of their physical characteristics. This effort can be further enhanced by policies that have a lateral impact on removing impairment for older workers in the workplace. For instance, workers compensation, income protection, superannuation and Occupational Health and Safety laws that optimise access to the workplace can enhance participation of older workers and workers with disability without isolating them as particularly burdensome demographics in the workplace.[2]

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[2] Australian Human Rights Commission (2012) Working Past our 60s: Reforming Laws and Policies for the Older Worker

4.2 Evolving Role of Recruiters

Recruiters can play an educative role to play with employers to ensure that suitable applicants are identified based on skills. Recruiters can facilitate understanding and filter out generalisations during various stages of the recruitment process. However, candidates must be cognizant that the recruitment industry is relying evermore on IT infrastructure to identify and source candidates.

Older workers should be assisted in the development of basic IT skills to make themselves visible in the employment market. They should be made aware of the way in which contemporary recruitment methods and hold realistic expectations of current practice as to not be deterred or disappointed by the job search experience. Through developing greater awareness of contemporary recruitment practices, older job seekers can reassess the language and format of their self representation as well as develop job search habits beyond that of a reactive engagement whereby they only seek new employment upon termination of the previous one.

Finally, recruiters can assist employers in building capacity to support the productive employment of older workers or workers with disability. This can occur during the interview and induction process as well as helping clients identify grants and financial subsidies available on a state and federal level.

By helping employers identify information, cost and risk, recruiters can be effective communicators and educators in facilitating the employment of older workers and workers with disability.

Appendix A – Companies Interview

- ACM Healthcare
- Adecco Australia
- Alecto Medical Recruitment
- Aspect Personnel
- Australia Wide Personnel
- Bayside Group
- Beaumont Consulting
- Charterhouse Medical
- Consultive
- Cox Purtell
- DFP Recruitment
- Elias Recruiment
- Galaxy Recruitment
- Harry Schwarz Consulting
- Heather Hill Nursing Agency
- Hender Consulting
- Horner HRO2
- Kelly Services (Australia) Ltd
- Living Recruitment and GAP Resource Management Pty Ltd
- Majer
- Manpower Group
- Mantra Men at Work Labour
- MCBI SA & NT PTY LTD
- Mining People
- Nicole Underwood Pty Ltd
- OnTalent
- Optimum Consulting
- Robert Walters
- Workforce Extensions Osborne

Appendix B – Survey Questionnaire

1. Company Name

| |
| |

2. State / Territory

| |
| |

3. Company Size (total number of direct employees)

| |
| |

4. Company Size (total number of branches)

| |
| |

5. How many people working in your office are 45-55 years old?

| |
| |

6. How many people in your office are 55+ years old?

| |
| |

7. Services provided by the company

On Hire	Contract	Permanent Placement	On Hire Contractors	Other

8. What age group would you regard as being Older workers?

Aged 40+	Aged 45+	Aged 50+	Aged 60+

9. Does it vary with different occupations and industries?

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10. Which categories do you place older workers in?

On Hire	Contract	Permanent Placement	On Hire Contractors	Other

11. Are some categories more prevalent than others?

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12. Thinking about your experience in the Recruitment Industry, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about older workers?

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Older workers have good skills					
Older workers have positive attitudes to work					
Older workers have lower turnover rates					
Older workers have more life experience to apply to decision-making					
Older workers are good mentors for younger employees					
Older workers are keen to learn new skills					
Older workers have outdated skills					
Older workers are slower					
There are more health concerns with older workers					
Older workers are not interested in career progression					
Older workers want to work less hours					
Older workers are more prepared to do a range of different things					
Older workers lack IT skills					
Older workers do not fit into a modern workplace culture					
Older workers are more expensive to employ					

It is not worth hiring older workers because most plan on leaving the workforce					
It is difficult to retrain older workers					

13. Thinking about your clients, how often have you heard them make comments such as the following?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Older workers have good skills				
Older workers have positive attitudes to work				
Older workers have lower turnover rates				
Older workers have more life experience to apply to decision-making				
Older workers are good mentors for younger employees				
Older workers are keen to learn new skills				
Older workers have outdated skills				
Older workers are slower				
There are more health concerns with older workers				
Older workers are not interested in career progression				
Older workers want to work less hours				
Older workers are more prepared to do a range of different things				
Older workers lack IT skills				
Older workers do not fit into a modern workplace culture				
Older workers are more expensive to employ				
It is not worth hiring older workers because most plan on leaving the workforce				
It is difficult to retrain older workers				

14. How often do job descriptions provided by clients contain words with connotations specific to:

Description	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Age				

Personality				
Physical Capability				

15. How strongly do you agree with these statements about workers with disability?

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Employers generally don't know what support a person with disability would require, and the extent to which they need to provide this support.					
Employers do not know how much it would cost, and whether funding is available to assist in the hiring of a disabled person.					
Employers fear the risk of performing acts towards a disabled employee in the workplace that would result in a discriminatory legal action.					

16. Do you currently experience any barriers or hesitation in placing older workers?

Yes	
No	

17. If yes, what are the barriers and how do you respond to these barriers?

18. Do you think your clients are now becoming more or less receptive to hiring older workers?

More	
No change	
Less	

19. Why?

20. Do you think the rescruitment industry in particular is now becoming more or less receptive to hiring older workers?

More	
No change	
Less	

21. Why?

22. In general, do you think skill shortages are making clients more receptive to hiring older workers?

Yes	
No	

23. Why?

24. What role can recruitment companies play in assisting older workers remain in or re-enter the workforce?

25. What do you think are the key workforce expectations of people in different age groups?

20s	
30s	
40s	
50s	

26. In your experience, do interview formats have an impact in improving the recruitment rate of workers with disability or older workers?

Yes	
No	

27. Why?

28. Have you assisted employers in building capacity to support the productive employment of people with disability or older Australians?

Yes	
No	

29. If yes, how?

30. Any further comments