

Employer attitudes to managing age, flexible work and retirement

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Presentation structure

- Introduction to the research
- Employer attitudes to flexible work and retirement
- Rationales and influences on employer attitudes
- Conclusions

About the research

- Funded by the Nuffield Foundation and carried out in 2008.

Aimed to:

- Explore how effectively and comprehensively employers were responding to workforce ageing.
- Focus on management issues and problems encountered, as well as good practice.
- Gauge employer responses to the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 and proposed end of DRA.

Methods:

- Secondary analysis of WERS 2004
- Qualitative interviews with employers

The employer sample

Size	Sector	Flexibility
Large (10)	Commercial (20)	Low (10)
Medium (11)	Non-profit (7)	Average (8)
Small/Micro (13)	Statutory (7)	High (16)

Breakdown of employers by type of industry

- Agriculture, mining and utilities (3)
- Finance, real estate, other business activities (1)
- Wholesale, retail and hospitality (5)
- Manufacturing and construction (7)
- Transport, storage and communication (4)
- Education, health, and other public/personal services (14)

Factors influencing availability of pro-age policies

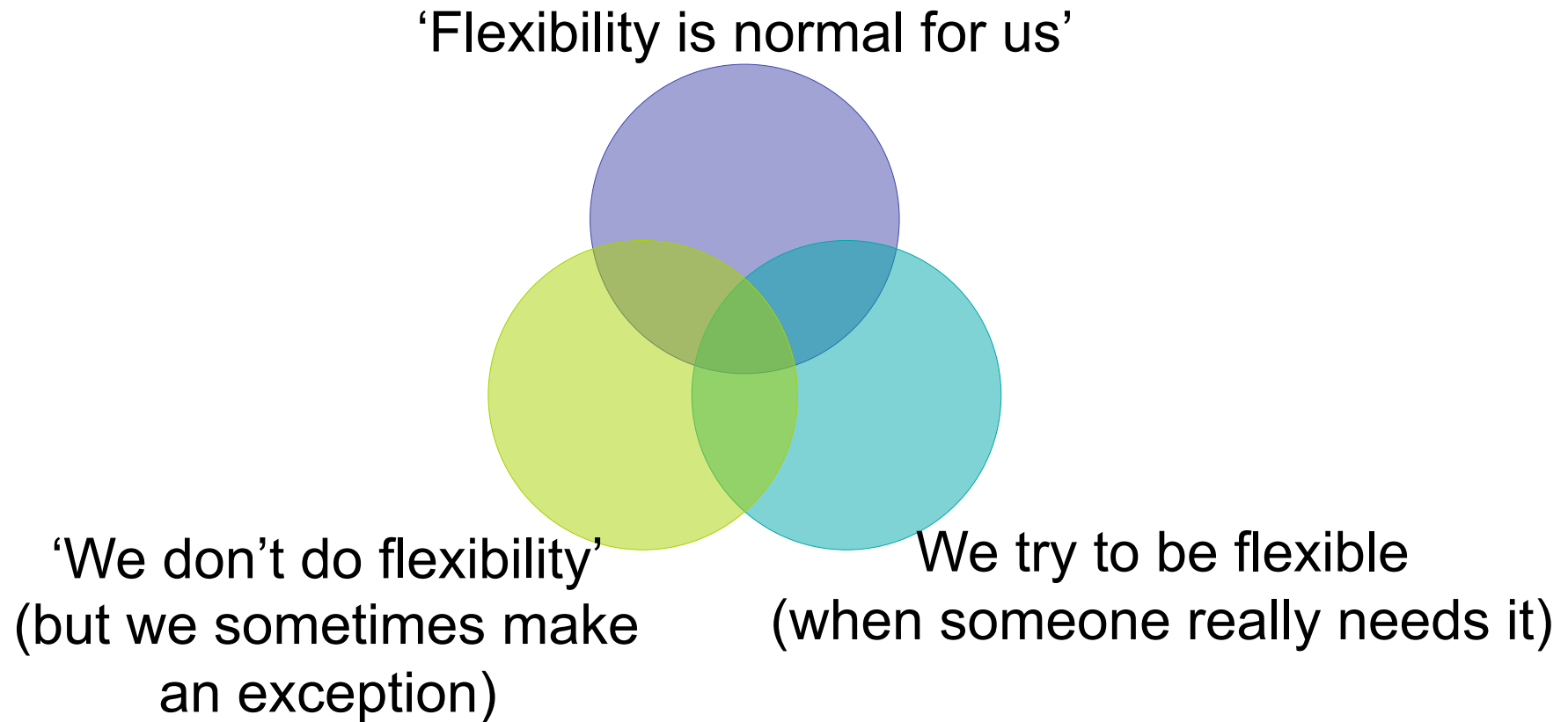
Positively associated:

- Larger, unionised workplaces.
- Public sector.
- Financial sector, utilities, public administration, health and community services.

Negatively associated:

- Male dominated workplaces.
- High proportion of manual jobs and workers over 50.
- Construction, and hotel and catering industry.

Flexible work – employer attitudes



‘Deserved’ or ‘earned’ flexibility

HR Manager: *We wouldn't do it I guess if I am honest to address issues of work-life balance.*

Researcher: *What if that individual had approached you and said, you know, my elderly mother needs care?*

HR Manager: *Very different, we'd take a much more flexible view of that.*

(Small, low-flexibility employer, education, health and public services)

Flexibility and age management

- 'Age blind' approach.
- Health and caring responsibilities seen as triggers for needing flexibility.
- Short-term solutions rather than long-term strategies.
- Reliance on employee to take the initiative.
- Rationales which favour loyalty and long service.
- Little reference to regulatory framework.

Flexible retirement

- Limited availability of formal phased retirement schemes.
- But employers often receptive to requests – entirely routine for some.
- Generally viewed as immediate prelude to retirement, rather than long-term age management strategy.
- Some employers have negative views.

All it means is that you've got somebody that really doesn't want to be there, and just doing three days a week because they've got to downscale until they get to 60.... I don't always agree that actually if you're going to make somebody part-time it is the panacea for everything.

(Line manager, Medium, medium-flexibility employer, education, health and public services)

What would probably happen, I suspect, is that, that person that's stepped down would then be written off a bit, you know... Like "They're out of the game now".... Or indeed they're going on a route that takes them out of the college.

(Line manager, Large, high-flexibility employer, education, health and public services)

Influences on employer attitudes and practices

- Size
- Sector
- Organisational culture
- Age profile of workforce
- Desire to contain demand for flexible practices

Discussion and conclusions

- Reactive and ad hoc employer approaches limit access to flexible work and retirement options for older people.
- Employers may also be less inclined to offer them in the current economic climate.
- Lack of flexibility is a major barrier to extending working lives and to re-entering work, especially for older people with a health problem.
- Removal of DRA and proposed universal right to request are positive, but more is needed to extend awareness/good practice.