

Employment Practices and Employability of the Hidden Talent Pool:

THE MATURE WORKERS

*Report on current employer hiring practices and perspectives
related to the employability of workers aged 45 years and over*

October 2012

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The logo for CEDEC features a stylized graphic of three curved, overlapping lines in shades of green and blue, resembling a wave or a stylized 'C'. Below this graphic, the word "CEDEC" is written in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By 2036, according to Census Canada projections, over half of the population of Quebec will be above the age of 45. This changing dynamic in the labour force poses new challenges but we believe it also poses some unique opportunities. For example, 40% of workers aged 45 and over living in the Greater Montreal Area are bilingual. Nearly 50% of respondents to a recent CEDEC employability survey earned a university degree.

Since 2009, CEDEC has been studying the unique needs and challenges of unemployed and underemployed English-speaking Quebecers aged 45 and older. The studies were part of CEDEC's Mature Workers Initiative that aims to successfully reintegrate English-speaking mature workers into Quebec's labour market. In 2011, CEDEC released the Mature Workers Employability Report, which outlined the perceived challenges of nearly 700 mature workers throughout the Greater Montreal Area. In the next phase, CEDEC surveyed employers, recruitment agencies and employment service providers to understand their perspectives on the opportunities or challenges associated with hiring a mature worker.

The survey findings among most employers suggest that mature workers maintain a positive reputation in the workforce. For instance, employers perceive older workers as generally stable, productive, committed, responsible, and highly motivated with strong work ethics. Nonetheless, these workers seem to have difficulty finding employment; they experience various levels of prejudice (ageism) when looking for work and are keenly aware that they are being discriminated against as a result of their age. The stakeholders surveyed mentioned several critical factors affecting English-speaking mature workers' capacity to find employment. These include a lack of French language skills, unrealistic salary expectations, lack of technological (mostly computer) skills, a resistance to change and unwillingness to work long hours or overtime. In addition to these perceptions, many programs and initiatives such as "diversity training with a focus on intergenerational conflict" may be relevant to mature workers, but are not necessarily being offered by the majority of employers.

The detailed findings of these surveys along with strategic recommendations are presented in the following report entitled: "Employment Practices and Employability of the Hidden Talent Pool: The Mature Workers".

BACKGROUND

The following research report examines employers' current hiring practices and perspectives with respect to the hiring of a mature worker. It also considers the needs and challenges mature workers face when looking for employment. The report also presents strategic recommendations related to the employability of workers aged 45 years and over. The study is part of CEDEC's **Mature Workers Initiative** that aims to develop long-term strategies to retain and re-integrate English-speaking mature workers into Quebec's labour market.

Three specific groups were surveyed for this analysis: employers, employment service providers, and recruitment agencies located in the Greater Montreal Area. The surveys were administered from February 24th to June 14th, 2012, in English and French.

Respondents were derived from numerous sources, using various venues of communication, including online media, radio stations, business journals and business associations, as well as several boards of trade located in the Greater Montreal Area. Press releases appeared in online media, and an interview describing the study was conducted by a media outlet. Contacts with respondents were also made at employment fairs. Non-profit organizations, educational institutions and government departments were also asked to respond to the employer survey. Overall, 223 employers, 76 employment service providers, and 102 recruitment agencies were contacted about the study. Of these totals, 57 employers, 19 employment service providers, and 11 recruitment agencies' responded to the surveys administered. The response rates were 25.6%, 25%, and 10.8% respectively for each stakeholder category.

Gathering the opinions from the public, the samples of these surveys were indeed self-selected. As such, it is difficult to know to what extent the responses obtained were representative of the populations of employers, employment service providers, and recruiters located in the Greater Montreal Area. However, the perspectives of these groups of respondents provided valuable insights about the possible issues faced by mature workers in the job market. Hence, while it may be more difficult to generalize in absolute terms, the information collected clearly outlines perceived benefits and challenges of hiring mature workers. The reliability of the findings obtained through the surveys was enhanced by the fact that the three questionnaires administered contained similar questions. This type of "triangulation" of information enabled CEDEC to look at specific areas of inquiry from the perspective of three critical stakeholder groups involved in the hiring and recruitment of mature workers.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLES

As mentioned above, 57 employers answered the survey. Of these, more than three-quarters (76.4%) were located in the city of Montreal, and the rest in various surrounding areas, including Anjou, Baie D'Urfé, Boucherville, Laval, LaSalle, and Varennes.

Almost half (47.4%) were privately-owned companies, 42.1% were non-for-profit organizations, 5.3% were publically owned, and 5.3% were government agencies or associations. There was a good balance between the number of privately owned companies and non-for-profit organizations that participated in the study.

There was a wide distribution in terms of the size of employers, with 28% having 10 or fewer employees, 24.6% having between 11 and 50 employees, 28.1% having between 51 and 300 employees, and 19.3% having more than 300 employees. In other words, there was a fairly proportional representation of small, medium and large companies and organizations in this study.

The most prominent industry the employers operated in and mentioned by the respondents was the community/ not-for-profit sector (29.8%), followed by transportation and warehousing (14%), retail trade (12.3%), professional scientific or technical services (12.3%), wholesale trade (8.8%), finance/insurance (7.0%), customer service (7.0%), healthcare and social assistance services (7.0%), and manufacturing (5.3%). The rest of the industries were mentioned with a frequency of less than 5%.

Employers were also asked what language requirements were necessary within their organization; specifically whether employees needed an advanced, intermediate or beginner language level. At an advanced level, spoken French was required by 58.1% of employers, whereas advanced written French was required by 45.8%. Interestingly, advanced spoken English was required by 54.4% of the respondents, and advanced written English was required by 50%. Thus, language requirements were similar for both official languages, at least at an advanced level.

Of the 19 employment service providers that answered the survey, about two-thirds (68.4%) were not-for-profit, whereas 31.6% were for-profit services. The employment service providers were located predominantly in Montréal (78.9%), with the rest situated in other areas including Laval and La Prairie. One service provider was located in Toronto, but operated across Canada.

Of the 11 recruitment agencies that filled in the questionnaire, 72.7% were agencies with more than two recruiters while a one-person recruiter firm represented 27.3% of the sample.

Most of the recruitment firms (72.7%) operated in specific industries. The most often mentioned sectors were finance/insurance, corporation or company management, customer service, and administrative or other support services (three respondents per sector).

Finally, almost three-quarters of the recruitment agencies were located in Montreal (72.7%), with the rest located in outlying areas, including Brossard and Châteauguay.

GENERAL FINDINGS REGARDING HIRING AND RECRUITMENT

Employers were asked how many employees were hired by the organization in the last year. The most common answer was 1-10 employees (59.9%), followed by 11-50 (15.7%), 50 and more individuals (15.7%), and 8.7% hired no employees in the last year.

The most common method used by employers to recruit candidates for their organization was referral (71.9%), followed by job boards (45.6%), the organization's website (43.9%), employment service providers (31.6%), social and professional media (31.6%), and recruitment firms/agencies (21.1%). A small proportion, seven percent of the respondents, mentioned Quebec employment sites, such as Emploi-Québec's site.

A significant minority of employers (43.9%) said they were currently experiencing shortages or difficulties finding qualified candidates and 56.1% said they were not. A total of 21 positions were mentioned in terms of experiencing workforce shortages. The most commonly mentioned positions were: skilled manual jobs (such as metallurgists, electricians, etc.), financial consultants, administrative positions, employment counsellors, managers and sales representatives.

More than a third (36.8%) of employers anticipated a shortage of qualified workers in the next ten years, whereas 63.2% did not. Of those who anticipated a shortage, 47.6% intended to hire mature workers to deal with this issue, 42.9% intended to invest more in recruitment efforts, 42.9% intended to invest in the retention of mature workers, and 33.3% intended to generally hire more workers.

The great majority of employers (78.9%) felt that their organization's current recruitment strategy was effective in attracting skilled workers in an increasingly competitive global labour market, whereas 21.1% felt that they were not. The major obstacle mentioned in terms of attracting candidates was salary expectations and restrictions.

Employment service providers were asked whether they offer special programs or workshops targeted to select groups of job seekers. The majority of the service providers (89.5%) indicated that they did offer special programs, whereas 10.5% did not. In fact, mature workers represented the group of job seekers that were targeted the most regarding special programs and workshops (70.6%), followed by those in career transition (52.9%), immigrants (52.9%), professionals (41.2%), and blue collar workers (17.6%).

Service providers listed over 20 specialty services that they provided to job seekers. In some instances, the organizations only referred to their services in general terms, such as providing a job readiness program. The most frequently mentioned services were interview techniques (6 responses), resume writing (5), networking (4), and career management (3). Services, such as stress management, career transition, and entrepreneurship counselling were each mentioned twice. Lastly, skills assessment, psychometric testing, mentoring, workshops for single mothers, workshops on age discrimination, mature worker coaching, industrial visits, cover letter writing, image consulting, retirement planning, and internships abroad were also mentioned by the respondents.

GENERAL FINDINGS REGARDING HIRING AND RECRUITMENT

Among the last stakeholder group that was surveyed, the recruitment agencies, the number of mature worker placements these firms made per year varied greatly. For instance, 18.2% of the agencies made between 0 and 10 placements per year, 27.3% made 11-25 placements, 18.2% made 26-50 placements, 9.1% made 51-100 placements, and 27.3% made more than 100 placements.

The most common methods used by recruitment agencies to find suitable candidates were referrals (90.9%), social and professional media (72.7%), the organization's website (63.6%), job boards (36.4%), and employment service providers (36.4%).

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES OFFERED BY EMPLOYERS

Employers were asked what programs and initiatives their company/organization currently provides to its employees, what programs the employers intend to offer in the next five years or whether such programs were not feasible in the next five years.

In terms of “phased retirement”, 19.1% of employers said they currently offer this program, 17% said it will be offered within the next five years, and 63.8% said it was not feasible to offer the program in the near future. Approximately a quarter of employers (27.3%) said they have an “official mentorship program”, 18.2% intended to offer it within the next five years, and 54.5% were not intending to offer it in the near future.

Almost a quarter of employers (22.4%) have an “official succession planning” program, whereas 30.6% will offer it within the next five years, and 46.9% did not plan to offer this program in the near future. A smaller percentage (18.8%) currently offer “diversity training with a focus on intergenerational conflict”, whereas 22.9% will offer it within the next five years, and 58.3% indicated that it will not be feasible to offer it in the future.

A quarter (25%) of employers offer “training and skill-building geared towards mature workers”, whereas 29.2% planned to offer it within the next five years, and 45.8% said it was not feasible to offer it in the future. About a quarter (26.1%) of employers offer “retirement planning services” to their employees, whereas 17.4% will offer it within the next five years, and 56.5% did not plan to offer it. Almost half (45.8%) of employers “rehire retired workers on a part-time basis”, 20.8% will do so in the future, and 33.3% will not do so in the next five years.

Three-quarters (75%) of employers have part-time employees, whereas 9.6% said they will hire part-time workers in the future, and 15.4% will not. A significant majority (80%) currently offer “flexible hours”, eight % of the respondents will offer this option in the next 5 years, and 12% will not. About half (52.1%) of employers allow “working from home”, whereas 16.7% will allow this type of work in the future, and 31.2% will not.

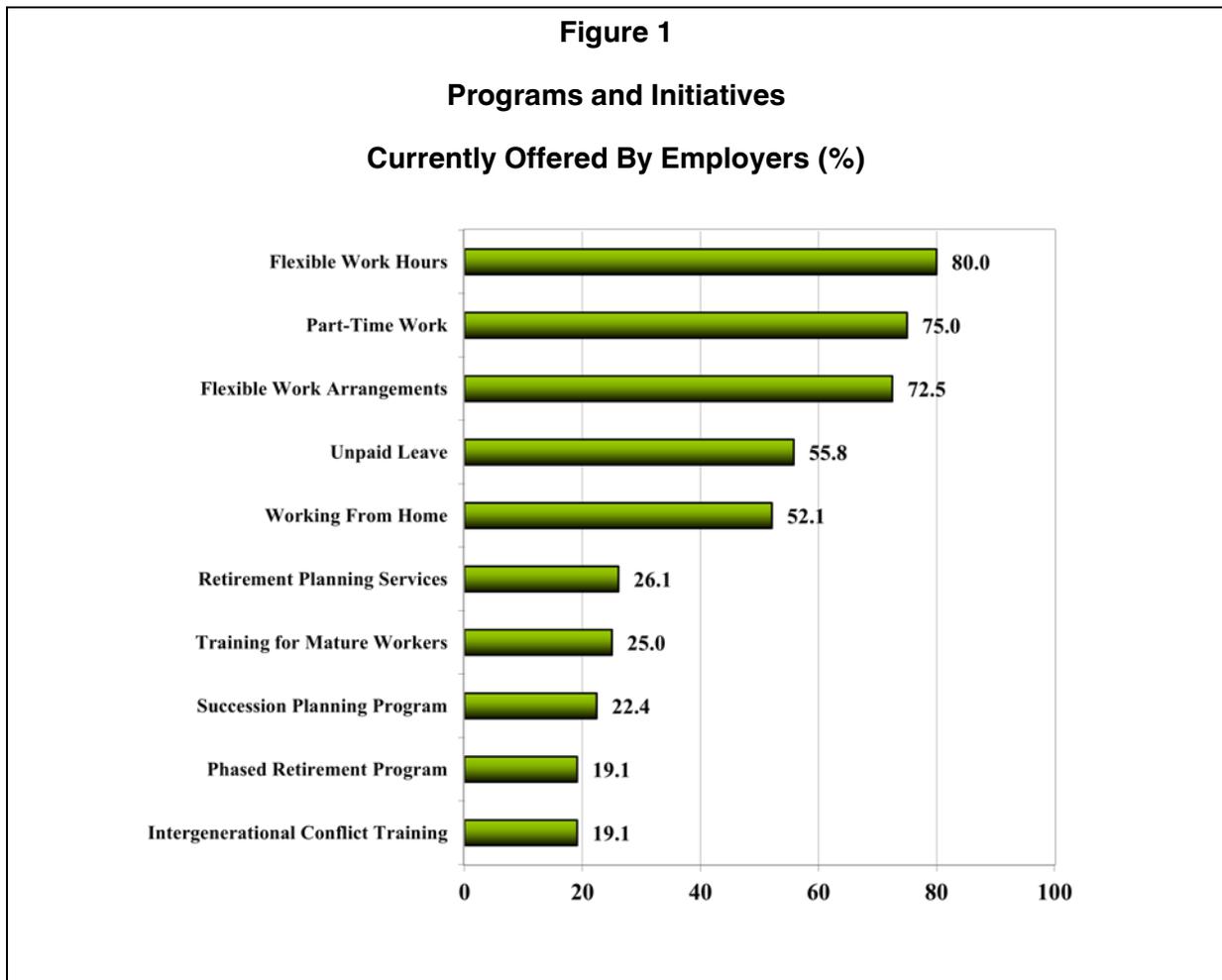
“Job sharing” is practiced by 28.6% of employers, whereas 30.9% will offer it in the future, and 40.5% will not. Finally, 55.8% of employers provide an “unpaid leave”, whereas 11.6% will offer this option in the next five years, and 32.6% will not.

In summary, as demonstrated in the *Figure 1*, the programs most widely offered by employers are “flexible work hours” (80%), the possibility of “part-time work” (75%), “flexible work arrangements” (72.5%), “unpaid leave” (55.8%), and “working from home” (52.1%). Less than half (45.8%) of employers engage in “rehiring retired workers on a part-time basis”.

Employers are less likely to offer “job sharing” (28.6%), “official mentorship programs” (27.3%), “retirement planning services” (26.1%), and “training and skill-building geared towards mature workers” (25%). Finally, they are least inclined to offer an “official succession planning program” (22.4%), a “phased retirement program” (19.1%), or “diversity training with a focus on intergenerational conflict” (19.1%).

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES OFFERED BY EMPLOYERS

It is critical to note that all of these programs might have an effect on mature workers in relation to their working conditions, or the possibility of these workers being hired in the first place. For instance, employers who think that mature workers generally want more flexible work schedules, may be less inclined to hire them if they don't offer this option in their workplace, and don't intend to offer it in the future. An overview of employers' perceptions of the needs of mature workers is covered in this report.



About a third (33.4%) of employers said that more than half of employees in their organization were over 45 years of age; 29.8% of the respondents indicated that between 26% and 50% of their workforce is more than 45 years old; and 36.9% indicated that between 1% and 25% of their employees were over 45 years old. In short, there was a wide distribution in terms of the percentage of mature workforce among employers.

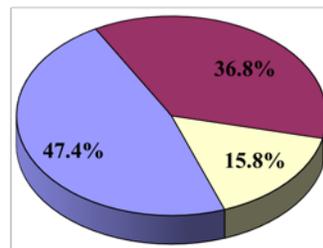
EMPLOYABILITY AND CHALLENGES OF MATURE WORKERS

Among employment service providers, about a third (31.6%) indicated that between 1% and 25% of their clientele were mature workers, 26.3% said that between 26%-50% were mature workers, and 42.1% indicated that more than half of their clientele were mature workers. In fact, 31.6% indicated that at least three-quarters of their clientele were mature workers, suggesting that a significant proportion of these service providers had extensive exposure to mature job seekers.

As seen in the *Figure 2*, nearly half of the employment service providers (47.4%) indicated that mature workers, usually take longer to find meaningful work as compared to other job seekers; 36.8% indicated that this situation occurs “sometimes” and 15.8% said that mature workers do not really take longer to find meaningful employment. In short, a significant proportion of service providers believe that mature workers take a longer time to find work.

Figure 2

Whether Mature Workers Take Longer to Find Meaningful Employment According to Employment Service Providers



■ Usually

■ Sometimes

□ Not Really

EMPLOYABILITY AND CHALLENGES OF MATURE WORKERS

In terms of recruitment agency professionals, 36.4% indicated that mature workers comprised 1%-25% of their files, almost half (45.5%) said these workers represented 26%-50% of their files, and 18.2% said they comprised 51%-75% of the job seekers in their files. None of the respondents had over 75% of mature (aged 45 and over) job seekers in their files.

When asked about the placements made, 63.7% of recruitment agency professionals suggested that mature workers comprised 1%-25% of their placements, 27.3% said these job seekers represented 26%-50% of their placements, and 9.1% said they comprised between 51% and 75%. None said they comprised more than 75% of placements. These findings demonstrate that the percentage of mature workers in recruiters' files is greater than the percentage of placements of these workers and suggests that mature job seekers might be more difficult to place than individuals from other age categories. This supports the perception of employment service providers that mature workers usually take longer to find meaningful employment.

THE AGE FACTOR

Employers were asked whether they thought age was a factor to be considered in the hiring process. About a quarter of them (26.3%) stated that age was a factor, whereas 73.7% said it was not. It is important to take into account that certain legal and ethical implications might affect the responses. For instance, the employer can be at risk of being sued on the grounds of discrimination if candidates are being rejected for positions they qualify for solely due to age.

The respondents who have indicated that age might be a factor in the hiring process were asked about the specific concerns they might have. The main concern regarding mature workers related to the length of time they will ultimately stay on the job. Several other concerns were mentioned. These included the physical capacity, the level of energy and of technical expertise required for the job, the need to travel, very high salary expectations and the difficulty of younger staff to relate to a mature manager.

Employment service providers were also asked whether in their opinion, companies are reluctant to hire mature workers solely because of their age. While more than two-thirds (68.4%) of the respondents mentioned that they “usually” are reluctant and 31.6% said they are “sometimes” reluctant, none of the employment service providers responded that companies are never reluctant. In other words, 100% of service providers stated that companies are at least sometimes reluctant to hire mature workers only because of their age.

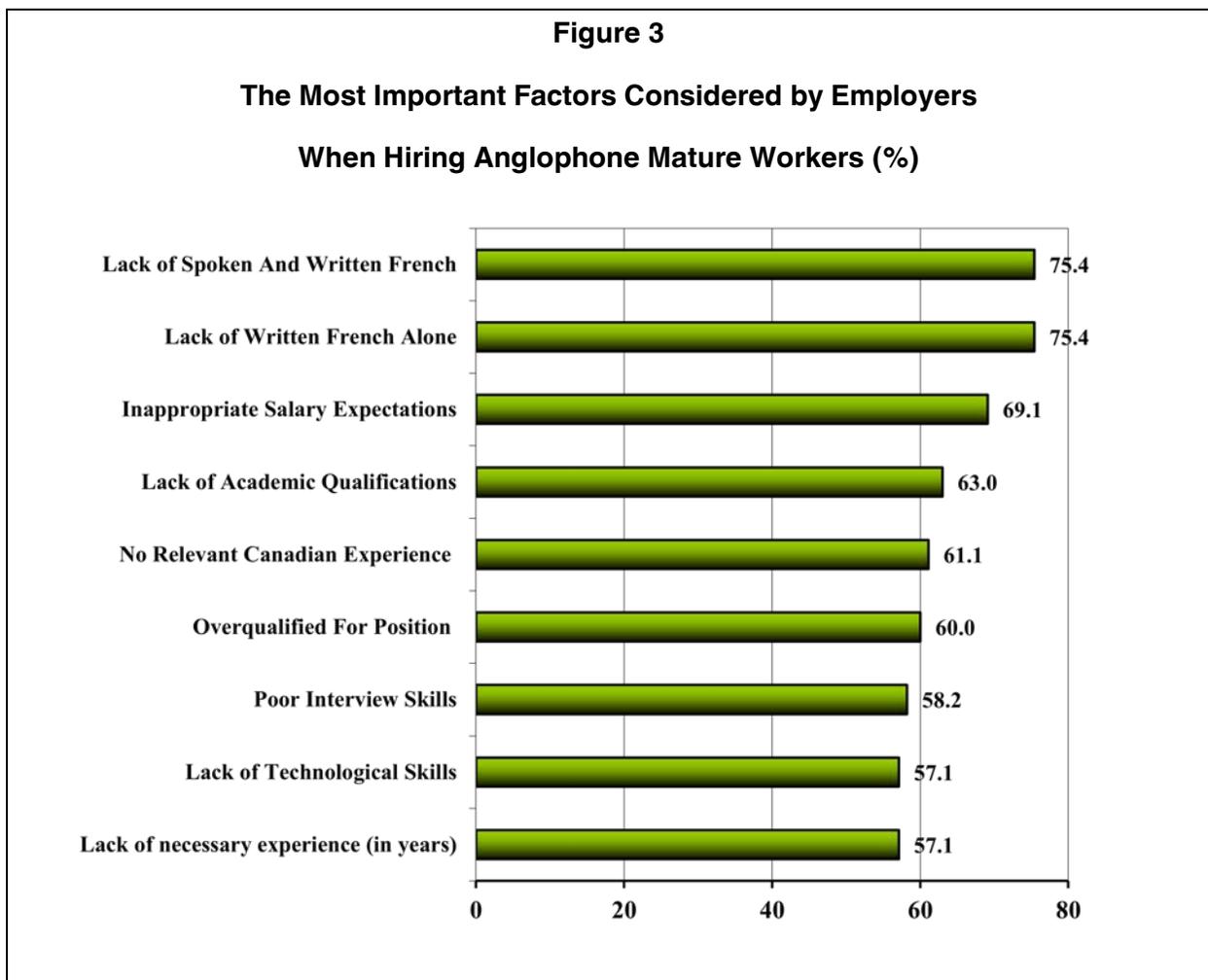
Nearly all (94.7%) of the employment service providers indicated that mature workers “usually” perceive that age is the major reason they are not finding work in their field of interest, while 5.3% believe that mature workers “sometimes” perceive age to be the main reason. In short, the great majority of service providers felt that mature workers are usually keenly aware of age discrimination when looking for work.

Finally, recruitment agency professionals were asked whether they felt that companies were reluctant to hire mature workers solely because of their age. About one third (36.4%) of recruiters said “yes”, and 63.6% did not think so.

The results demonstrate that employment service providers are very aware of the age discrimination in the job market. Recruitment agencies seem to see age discrimination as less pervasive, and employers are the least likely to say age discrimination plays a major consideration in hiring. It is probable that the unique role of each of these groups shapes the respondents’ perceptions. The employment service providers must “work around” such discrimination and emphasize strengths and benefits of hiring mature workers. The recruiter may be working with “higher-end” candidates, and age discrimination may be less of a factor. The employer, on the other hand, may either have difficulty admitting the importance of age in the screening process or do not perceive age to be an issue and prefer to minimize its role relative to other considerations, such as experience.

HIRING AND RECRUITMENT CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO MATURE WORKERS

Employers were asked how likely were various reasons to be considered when hiring decisions are made with regards to English-speaking mature candidates. *Figure 3* demonstrates to what extent employers thought the enumerated factors were “at least somewhat” a consideration. In other words, the percentages provided in the figure represent the total number of responses including “very likely” and “somewhat likely”. According to the findings, “lack of spoken and written French” and “lack of written French only” were the two main considerations of employers in regards to hiring English-speaking mature workers (75.4%). These factors were followed by inappropriate salary expectations for the position (69.1%), lack of the necessary academic qualifications for the position (63%), lack of relevant experience in Canada (61.1%), and over qualification of the candidate for the positions for which they applied (60%). Other considerations of relevance included the following: “did not succeed in demonstrating their skills in the interview process” (58.2%), “did not have the current skills necessary for the position (technology, new trends, etc.)” (57.1%), and “did not have the necessary years of experience for the position” (57.1%).



HIRING AND RECRUITMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Three considerations that were mentioned by less than the majority of respondents included: “had health and/or physical limitations that would hinder their job performance” (46.3%), “had requests for flexible work arrangements that could not be accommodated” (41.8%), and “did not have the necessary interpersonal skills for the position” (41.1%). The above can be taken as a profile of what employers judge to be important considerations when making hiring decisions regarding English-speaking mature workers.

Employment service providers were also asked what they considered to be the most significant reasons affecting English-speaking mature workers’ capacity to find employment. As with the employers’ responses, “very likely” and “somewhat likely” responses were merged. “Lack of spoken and written French” (84.3%) and “lack of written French only” (84.2%) were the two most likely reasons to impact on the capacity of these workers to find employment. These factors were followed by: “does not have relevant experience in Canada” (72.2%), “does not succeed in demonstrating their skills in the interview process” (72.2%), “does not have the current skills (technology, new trends, etc.) necessary for the position” (68.5%), “does not have the necessary academic qualifications for the position” (63.2%), and “is overqualified for the position for which they apply” (52.6%).

The rest of the factors garnered less than a majority of responses. For instance, 42.1% of the respondents outlined the following reasons were at least somewhat likely to impact English-speaking mature workers’ ability to gain employment: “has requests for flexible work arrangements that cannot be accommodated” (42.1%), “does not have the necessary years of experience for the position” (42.1%), “has salary expectations that are not appropriate for the position” (42.1%), “has health and/or physical limitations that will hinder their job performance” (36.8%), and “does not have the necessary interpersonal skills for the position” (33.3%).

Finally, recruitment agency professionals were asked about the factors affecting English-speaking mature workers’ capacity to find employment when applying for a position through their organization. The main factors mentioned were: “lack of written French alone” (90.9%), “lack of spoken and written French” (81.8%), “is overqualified for the positions for which they apply” (81.8%), “has salary expectations that are not appropriate for the position” (81.8%), and “does not have the current skills (technology, new trends, etc.) necessary for the position” (81.8%). A lesser majority of recruiters also said: “does not have relevant experience in Canada” (72.7%), “does not have the necessary academic qualifications” (54.6%), and “does not have the necessary years of experience for the position” (54.5%). Less than a majority considered the following factors: “does not have the necessary interpersonal skills for the position” (45.5%), “does not succeed in demonstrating their skills in the interview process” (45.5%), “has health and/or physical limitations that will hinder their job performance” (27.3%), and “has requests for flexible work arrangements that cannot be accommodated” (27.3%).

HIRING AND RECRUITMENT CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO MATURE WORKERS

Table 1 represents a summary of the data across the three groups of respondents. It is clear that the French language skills of the English-speaking mature worker are critical in terms of hiring considerations as there is a high level of agreement among all three groups in this regard. It is also evident that health and physical limitations, requests for flexible work arrangements, and insufficient interpersonal skills, are the least important considerations.

In terms of the factors in the middle range, agreement falls apart between the three groups. For instance, salary expectations are considered important by employers and recruitment agency professionals, but less so by employment service providers. Lack of interview skills is seen as much more important by employment service providers than employers and recruitment agency professionals. Each stakeholder group has its own interests and points of focus, depending on its role and responsibilities. The question is how the interests of mature workers can best be served given these different orientations and expectations?

Table 1
Factors Considered Important in the Hiring of Mature Workers
(Ranked by Level of Importance)

Factors	Employers	Employment Service Providers	Recruitment Agencies
<i>Lack of spoken and written French</i>	1	1	2
<i>Lack of written French</i>	1	1	1
<i>Does not have the necessary academic qualifications for the position</i>	4	6	7
<i>Does not have the necessary years of experience for the position</i>	8	8	7
<i>Does not have relevant experience in Canada</i>	5	3	6
<i>Is overqualified for the positions for which they apply</i>	6	7	2
<i>Has salary expectations that are not appropriate for the position</i>	3	8	2
<i>Does not have the current skills necessary for the position (technology, new trends, etc.)</i>	8	5	2
<i>Has health and/or physical limitations that will hinder their job performance</i>	10	11	11
<i>Has requests for flexible work arrangements that cannot be accommodated</i>	11	8	11
<i>Does not have the necessary interpersonal skills for the position</i>	11	12	9
<i>Does not succeed in demonstrating their skills in the interview process</i>	7	3	9

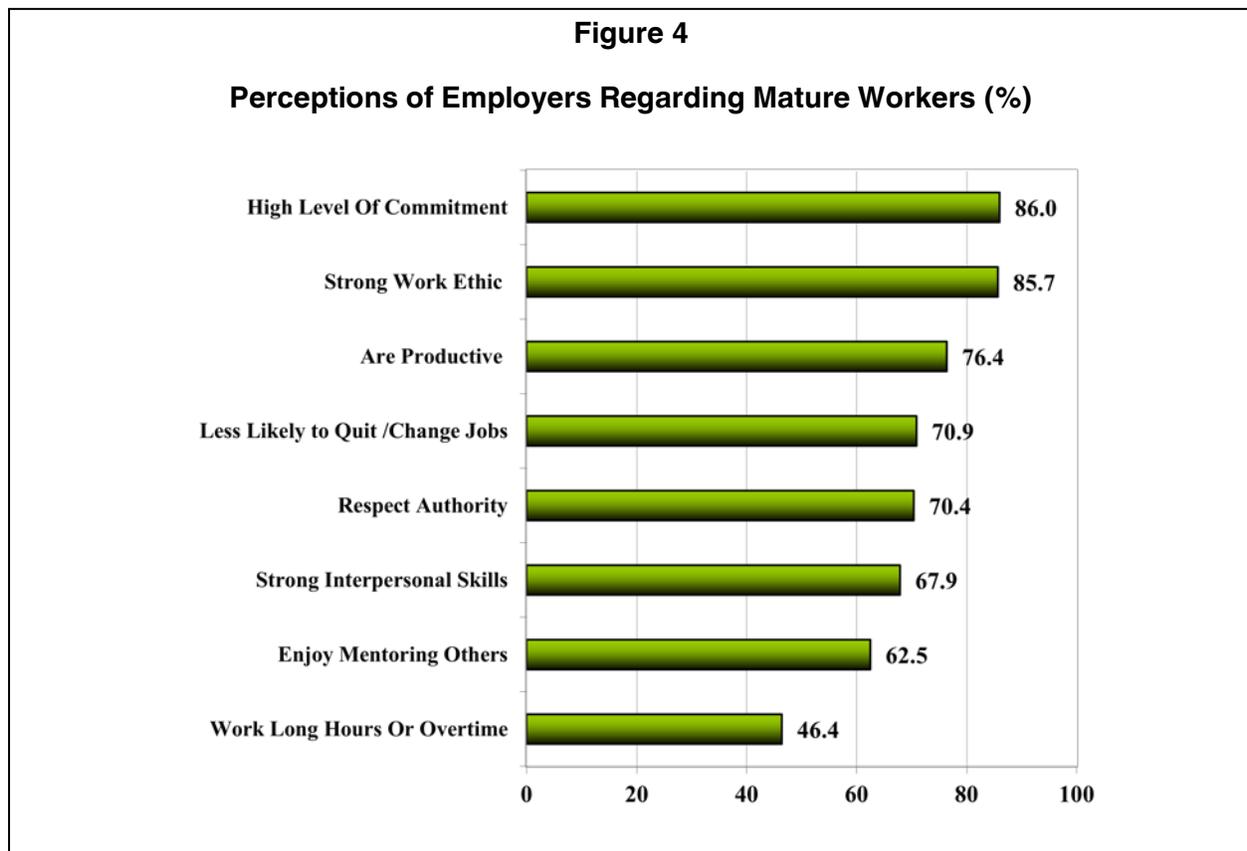
PERCEPTIONS REGARDING MATURE WORKERS

Figure 4 demonstrates the employers' responses as to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with several statements about the characteristics of mature workers. The response categories of "agree" and "strongly agree" were merged. Employers' perceptions were overall very positive. Employers were very agreeable that "mature workers demonstrate a high level of commitment to their jobs" (86%). They were also in concurrence that "mature workers have a strong work ethic" (85.7%). A strong level of agreement was also indicated for the following statements: "mature workers perform well and are productive on the job" (76.4%), "mature workers have a lower propensity to quit or change jobs" (70.9%), and "mature workers respect authority and get along well with their superiors" (70.4%). Mature workers were perceived as having "strong communication and interpersonal skills" (67.9%) and that they "enjoy mentoring and coaching others" (62.5%). However, less than a majority of employers agreed that "mature workers are likely to work long hours or overtime" (46.4%).

Some questions were worded in a negative way but still demonstrated the overall positive perception of mature workers. For instance, only 7.2% of employers felt that "mature workers lack ambition and motivation", and only 12.5% agreed that "mature workers have difficulty working with younger generations". Nonetheless, 21.5% of employers believed that "mature workers have a high rate of absenteeism"; 23.2% were convinced that "mature workers require flexible work arrangements"; and 29.6% agreed that "mature workers resist change and do not like to learn new things". The least positive response among the negatively-oriented questions was that more than a third (34.6%) of employers believed that mature workers have difficulty with new technology.

Additional research about the meaning of "new technology" was conducted through a follow up interview of several organizations that were initially contacted for the employer survey. In fact, the definition of new technology depends on the industry, organization, and position type. For instance, in a transportation company, "new technology" refers to the transportation technology used by the organization. For an administrative or managerial position, "having difficulty with new technology" is related to the difficulty working with Microsoft Office Suite, the lack of familiarity with Internet search engines and difficulty adapting to new office equipment such as printers.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING MATURE WORKERS



Employment service providers were asked to rate what they perceived to be the perceptions of employers regarding mature workers. The responses of “agree” and “strongly agree” were merged. Overall, this stakeholder group’s responses were in accordance with the employers’ favourable view of mature workers. As well, employment service providers have pointed out the less favourable statements, which were specified by employers to be the main areas of concern. In particular, 22.3% agreed that employers thought that “mature workers require flexible work arrangements” and 26.4% thought that mature workers “have difficulty with new technology”. The most unfavourable response of employers’ perceptions was that “mature workers resist change and do not like to learn new things” (31.6%).

Finally, recruitment agency professionals were also asked about employers’ perceptions of mature workers. Recruiters believed that employers were quite positive about their perception of mature workers on many fronts.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING MATURE WORKERS

Less than a majority (45.5%) of the recruitment agencies thought employers believed that “mature workers are likely to work long hours or overtime”. The rating for the statement that “mature workers require flexible work arrangements” was also quite favourable (18.2%). As well, the recruitment agencies’ most unfavourable perceptions of employers were that “mature workers resist change and do not like to learn new things” (45.5%), and that “mature workers have difficulty with new technology” (54.6%).

Summary of employers’ perceptions of mature workers

Given the findings outlined in this section, it is possible to conclude that employers perceive mature workers quite favourably across a number of different dimensions, mostly related to their productivity, commitment, work ethic, motivation, stability, and mentoring and communication skills. In short, the advantages of hiring a mature worker were clearly recognized, at least according to the perceptions of the employers involved in this study.

However, there were areas where mature workers were less positively perceived. In particular, mature workers were perceived to “resist change and not like to learn new things” and to “have difficulty with new technology”. They were also perceived to “not likely work long hours or overtime”. These three attitudes or perceptions likely represent the greatest “prejudices” associated with mature workers who are seeking employment.

Aside from the question related to their perceptions of mature workers, employers were asked about the benefits of hiring a mature person. The three most mentioned benefits were: life and work experience (31 responses), stability/steadiness (10), and maturity (10). Also mentioned by several employers were: good work ethic (8), commitment/dedication (7), reliability (6), competence/expertise (6), mentorship qualities (5), loyalty (4), and responsibility/dependability (4). Other benefits mentioned by respondents were: sound judgment (3), low absenteeism (2), good people skills (2), more focused (2), proper qualifications (2), deep networks (2), and knows what they want (2). Work experience and stability were among the most mentioned factors by the employment service providers.

BARRIERS IN FINDING EMPLOYMENT FOR MATURE WORKERS

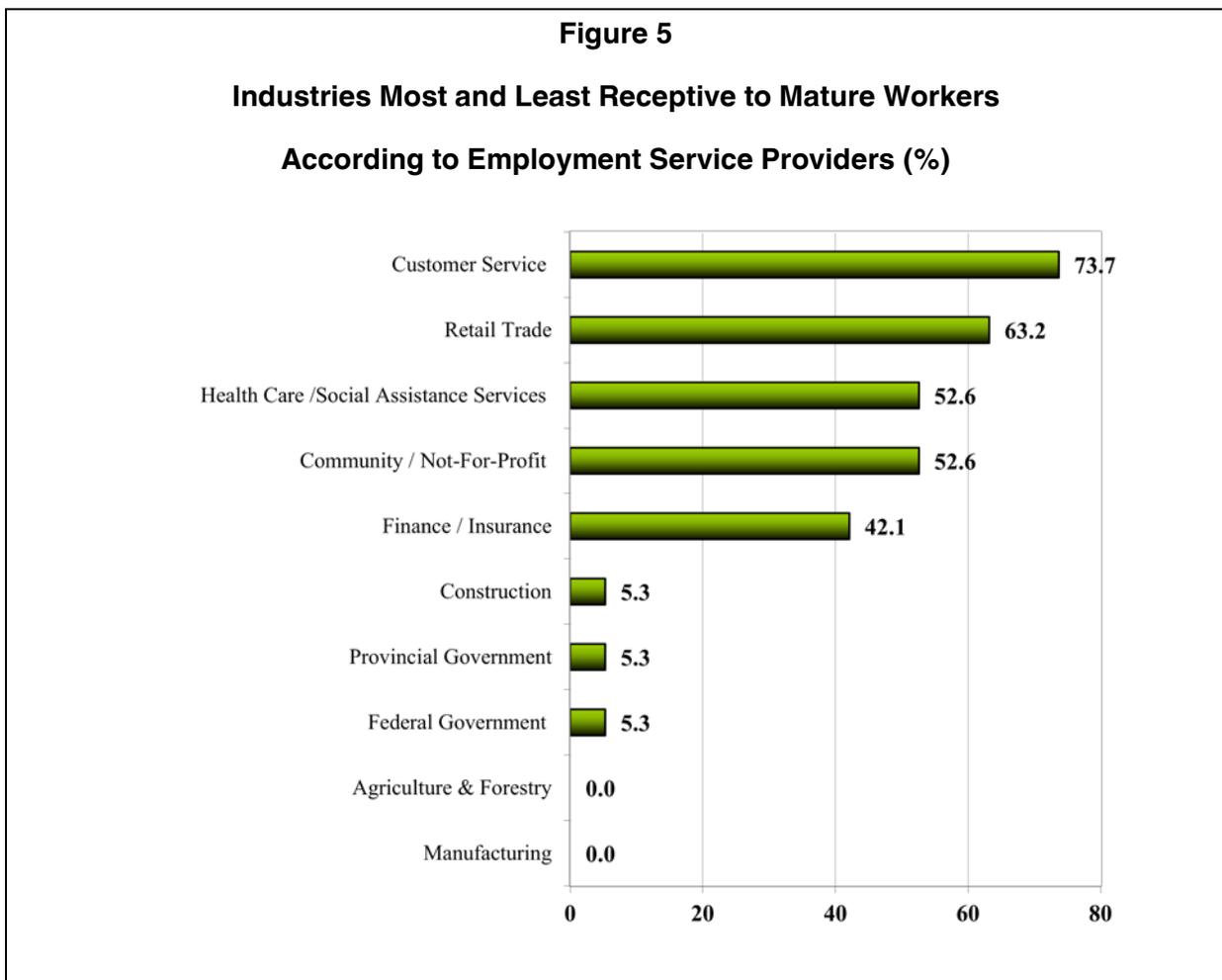
The major challenges identified by employment service providers in finding gainful and sustainable employment for mature workers in their fields of interest were “having employers understand the benefits of hiring mature workers”, “re-building the confidence of mature workers”, and “lack of French-language skills” (each category garnered 4 responses). “Lack of computer skills” was mentioned by 3 respondents. Challenges, including the “lack of knowledge about career transition / re-orientation”, “younger recruitment managers are biased against older workers”, and “general prejudice against older workers (ageism)” were each mentioned twice. Numerous single responses were given, including: “insufficient training/ education”, “lack of knowledge about the new job market”, “employers think older workers want too much money/benefits”, “difficulties in coming back to job market after a long break”, “some fields are not open to hiring mature workers”, “not all older workers want to work full time”, “older workers are not always fairly compensated”, and “some mature workers are over-qualified for the jobs they apply for”.

Recruitment agency professionals were likewise asked what challenges they face in finding employment for mature workers. The most mentioned barrier was “lack of computer skills” (3 responses). Single responses were given for: “perception of employers that worker will soon leave for retirement”, “clients prefer younger candidates”, “employers concerned that older workers will not get along with younger employees”, “employers concerned that mature workers will lack energy and dynamism”, “fear that mature workers will want too much money”, “perception of high absenteeism among mature workers”, “inadequate education/training”, and “concern that mature workers will lack physical fitness”.

INDUSTRIES RECEPTIVE TO MATURE WORKERS

The great majority of employment service providers (78.9%) believe that there are specific industries that are more readily accepting mature workers for employment, whereas 21.1% do not share this belief.

As demonstrated in *Figure 5*, according to employment service providers, the industries that are more receptive to mature workers include: customer service (73.7%), retail trade (63.2%), health care/social assistance services (52.6%), and community/not-for-profit (52.6%). Other sectors mentioned by respondents included: finance/insurance (42.1%), corporation or company management (42.1%), teaching services (42.1%), hotel/restaurant business (31.6%), inside sales/telemarketing (31.6%), and outside sales (31.6%). Also poorly receptive are: construction (5.3%), provincial government (5.3%), and federal government (5.3%). Employment service providers believe that the industries least receptive to employing mature workers are: manufacturing (0%), and agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (0%). In considering these results, we must take into account the small sample size of the employment service providers surveyed.



INDUSTRIES RECEPTIVE TO MATURE WORKERS

More than half (54.5%) of the recruitment agency professionals believe that there are specific industries that are more readily accepting of or experiencing a higher demand for mature workers, whereas 45.5% do not believe this to be the case.

The most commonly mentioned sectors considered to be more receptive were: customer service (27.3%), mining, oil and gas (18.2%), construction (18.2%), retail trade (18.2%), administrative and other support services (18.2%), and inside sales/telemarketing (18.2%). Given the small sample size of recruitment agency professionals, these results should be interpreted with caution.

The employment service providers and recruitment agency professionals have somewhat different perceptions of the industries that are favourable toward hiring mature workers. However, certain sectors are deemed favourable in both lists, including customer service, retail trade, and inside sales. It should be noted that these two groups likely target different sectors, and attract differently-qualified mature candidates as well.

CONCLUSIONS

There seems to be a major discrepancy in the findings of this report. On the one hand, mature workers seem to have a very positive reputation along different dimensions. For instance, employers perceive them as generally stable, productive, committed, responsible, motivated and having a strong work ethic. They are also considered to have valuable mentoring and interpersonal skills. In short, the advantages of hiring a mature worker are clearly recognized by employers. On the other hand, mature workers seem to have difficulty finding employment. They experience various levels of prejudice when looking for work and are keenly aware that they are being discriminated against because of their age.

To understand this discrepancy, one must pay careful attention to employers' hiring considerations. The findings demonstrate that the lack of French language skills is a critical factor, in particular when the hiring of English-speaking mature workers is concerned. Another issue relates to the salary expectations of mature workers; the employment service providers and recruiters can play a role in providing context regarding labour market conditions and personal expectations. Undoubtedly, mature workers will seek fair compensation for their experience and expertise, but especially in cases of career transitions, candidates' salary expectations must remain realistic.

Furthermore, the lack of technological skills (mainly related to computer literacy) is emphasized as a challenge for mature workers. Different segments of mature workers have different challenges in this regard. This issue must therefore be considered in the context of the life situation and career evolution of an individual. Assuming that all mature workers have difficulty with new technology is a stereotype that may fuel the discrimination that mature workers seem to experience in the labour market.

The programs and initiatives that may be relevant to mature workers are not necessarily being offered by the majority of employers. Employers need to become generally more open to alternate ways of managing their work force, which may benefit mature workers who may need flexibility of work scheduling and specialized training.

Moreover, as many employers anticipate a shortage of qualified workers in the next few years, and some intend to hire mature workers to fill the gap, it is possible that employers will make increasingly greater efforts to address the needs and expectations of older workers looking for employment. Such behaviour would certainly be in their best interests given the demographic trends.

Aside from the concern with the technological skills, there were other prejudices related to older workers. These included the perception that mature workers were "not likely to work long hours or overtime" and that they "resist change and do not like to learn new things". Given the positive associations related to their motivation, commitment, and respect for authority, these perceptions remain important impediments to employment of mature workers. In order to stimulate the growth of mature workers in the Quebec labour market, the report offers the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness campaign

While Quebec's mature workers have to adapt to the changing necessities of the labour market, government and employers have to also adjust to the ageing population and its implications for the workforce. Prior to designing strategies to effectively deal with this challenge, the stakeholders need to acknowledge the benefits mature workers bring to the workforce.

One suggestion is to promote the positive attributes of mature workers including stability, experience and maturity, to employers. This may involve more than just the focused efforts of employment service providers and recruitment specialists. In fact, an awareness campaign lauding the benefits of hiring and retaining mature workers may tackle the issue of ageism more directly. The campaign would target employers, political figures, media and the public while focusing not only on the benefits of hiring mature workers but also on changing negative perceptions about these workers.

This recommendation was also brought forth by the Quebec Association of Gerontology (AQG) within its current awareness campaign on the theme of "Ageism, let us talk about it!" (« Âgisme, parlons-en! »)¹. The campaign aims at creating awareness among Quebecers regarding different manifestations of ageism. An English version of the existing campaign targeting English-speaking employers and policy-makers would benefit mature workers. Furthermore, a report entitled "The Needs of Workers 55 + and Intergenerational Skill Development"², developed by CEDEC's Québec Chaudière-Appalaches office, suggested raising awareness about the advantages and the importance of hiring and effectively using workers who are on the verge of retiring. Additionally, the FADOQ (previously the Fédération de l'Âge d'Or du Québec) network's memo presented to the Groupe d'experts sur les travailleurs âgés³ recommends encouraging Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to play a more active role in terms of sensitizing enterprises and fighting against the stereotypes directed at mature workers. The following are suggestions for the targets and means that can be used to implement the awareness campaign.

a) Target:

Reaching out to the individuals involved in the hiring of mature workers would be critical in terms of a promotion strategy. Therefore, the awareness campaign should target several stakeholders, including different levels of government, educational institutions and employers.

¹ AQG available at: http://www.agg-quebec.org/120/l'agisme,_parlons-en!.gerontologie

² Thibeau, Anne. August 2009. "The Needs of Workers 55 + & Intergenerational Skill Development". CEDEC Strategy Recommendations

³ Réseau FADOQ. June 2007. « Pour favoriser l'adaptation du marché du travail aux changements démographiques ». Available at:

http://www.fadoq.ca/docs/documents/defensesdesdroits/memoiresetavis/2007/Groupe_federal_experts_travailleurs_ages.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness campaign (continued)

i. Educational institutions:

Sensitization within university and college-level human resources and organizational development programs is vital. Educational institutions play an important role in informing these future hiring professionals about the demographic changes and the need to ensure a balance between the younger and the older workforce. Courses within human resources management programs should emphasize the benefits of hiring and retaining mature workers while changing preconceived (negative) notions about mature workers. Such an approach may open to interesting jobs for mature job seekers.

ii. Government:

The government should also be sensitized to the need to hire mature candidates for federal and provincial jobs. According to employment service providers surveyed, the government sectors are among the least receptive to employing mature workers. As well, all levels of government should be sensitized to promote the benefits of hiring mature workers and change the negative perceptions about the latter. Initiatives, such as the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TLOW) should also target mature workers in large cities with a population of at least 250,000 to enable workers in these cities to access the program.

iii. Employers:

Currently, few companies have concrete strategies for retaining mature employees in their workforce. Many programs were determined not feasible within the next five years either due to the lack of resources or lack of seeing the need to invest in the retention of these workers. Such programs include official mentorship, diversity training, intergenerational training and skills development and geared towards mature workers.

Companies should understand and address the motivations and needs of mature employees while seeing the benefits of keeping mature workers on board. Another target might be industries least receptive to employing mature workers. Aside from the government sector, these include manufacturing, agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting as well as construction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness campaign (continued)

b) Means:

i. Workshops:

Among the specific means that should be used to achieve the goals of the awareness campaign are workshops on the benefits of hiring mature workers and intergenerational awareness workshops that could be conducted within organizations.

ii. Employment fairs:

Employment fairs targeting mature workers represent an effective way of increasing awareness among stakeholders. The fairs would involve the participation of employers, employment service providers and institutions providing training and development. Thus, this option would allow the job seekers to simultaneously find out about various types of services, programs and employment offered. CEDEC would assume an active role in the fairs as it would participate as a partner and eventually organize and lead the fairs. It is important to note that such fairs were also proposed by the report created in the Québec Chaudière-Appalaches region.

iii. Conferences:

Aside from the fairs, conferences also represent an effective way to sensitize employers and organizations working in employability to the demographic challenges and the means to effectively deal with these challenges.

iv. Massive marketing campaigns:

Lastly, the impact of the traditional media and social media in reaching employers, and the general public, would be vital to get the word out. In particular, massive marketing campaigns are recommended. While currently a campaign is conducted by the Quebec Association of Gerontology (AQQ), a sustained and collaborative effort on behalf of various organizations with continuous government support are required to change the deeply-engrained negative perceptions of mature workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Training and Development Programs

The provincial government should focus its efforts on promoting existing programs and developing new training and development programs and services specifically geared to mature workers. In particular, these should include French language courses, training on self-promotion tools, computer/information technology training as well as diversity and mentorship programs. While most of these programs already exist, there is a need to either make these more widely available or to increase the financial support to such programs.

a) French language courses:

Investment in the visibility of existing programs, such as *Francais langue seconde* offered by colleges and funded by Emploi-Québec, should be increased. Courses initially offered exclusively to the immigrant population should also become more accessible for Quebec's non-francophone and non-immigrant population 45 years and older. The surveys' findings demonstrate a critical need for an advanced level of written and spoken French, showing that 50% of employers, 63% of employment service providers and 73% of recruitment agencies considered it very likely that "lack of spoken and written French" was a factor affecting mature workers' capacity to find employment.

b) Training on self-marketing tools: (e.g. social media)

The findings of the surveys demonstrate that social media is currently used by 31% of employers and 73% of recruitment agencies in their search for candidates, which requires job seekers to be familiar with the tools used by recruiters. In other words, knowledge of social media tools is needed to enable job seekers to promote themselves effectively. Several employment service providers, sponsored by the provincial government, currently offer such training. Continued funding and promotion of such programs is necessary.

c) Computer/ information technology training:
(*Microsoft Office Suite as well as Internet and search engines*)

Despite being confident that their skills are current enough for today's labour market, some mature workers might need additional training to improve their knowledge of new technology. Surveys' findings showed that a large percentage of the three types of stakeholders (25% of employment service providers, 35% of employers, 55% of recruitment agencies) agree that "mature workers have difficulty with new technology". The main concerns expressed by the surveyed individuals were related to mature workers' difficulty working with the Microsoft Office Suite, lack of familiarity with the Internet and search engines and difficulty adapting to new office equipment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Training and Development Programs (continued)

d) Diversity training and mentorship programs:

Financial stimuli represent a means of encouraging programs such as diversity training with a focus on intergenerational conflict that would increase mutual understanding and cooperation between younger and older workers. Currently, only 19% of employers surveyed are offering this program, while for nearly 60% of employers such a program is not feasible within the next five years. Another way of emphasizing the benefits of the mature workforce can be a more widely available training program specifically geared to enhance the skills of mature workers. Training and skills-building geared towards mature workers is offered by a quarter of all employers that responded to the survey and rated non-feasible within the next five years by 46% of respondents. As well, mentorship programs would maximize the benefits of the expertise of mature workers. Official mentorship programs are offered by 27% of the respondent-employers. Therefore, government should encourage employers to develop and offer such programs through, among other measures, increased financial support and tax deductions.

Policies Addressing the Needs of Mature Workers and Encouraging Employers to Hire Mature Workers:

a) Recognition of volunteer experience:

While volunteer experience is encouraged for unemployed individuals, it is not a factor contributing to their successful placement. For instance, only 9% of the recruitment agencies and 5.3% of employment service providers believe that possessing volunteer experience was an important factor contributing to the successful placement of mature workers. Mature workers are also aware of this issue as more than half (59.4%) of the surveyed workers in 2011 said that they had volunteered at some point but more than half of these (54.6%) said volunteer experience did not help them in finding employment. Encouraging government and employers to recognize volunteer experience can contribute to the hiring of mature workers.

b) Inclusion of older persons in the Employment Equity Act:

As suggested in the report “Discrimination against Mature Workers: Knowing your Rights and Recourses” created by the NDG Senior Citizens’ Council, the federal government should “include older persons in the Employment Equity Act and the Act Respecting Equal Access to Employment”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policies Addressing the Needs of Mature Workers and Encouraging Employers to Hire Mature Workers: (continued)

- c) Financial measures integrated within policies that respond to changing demographics:
 - i. Wage subsidies to employers to hire mature workers. When setting up the wage subsidies it is important ensure that mature workers are not labeled as “needing help”, which will prevent employers from being eager to hire these workers.
 - ii. Provide tax deductions to employers for hiring individuals near retirement age or past the retirement age to enable these workers to reintegrate into the labour force.

Creation of Tools for Mature Workers

- a) Feasibility study of a delivery model of services for mature workers:

Findings of the mature workers surveys conducted in 2011 showed that only 27% of respondents were aware of the employability resources available to them. Therefore, it is important to ensure that job seekers have knowledge of various employability centers (employment service providers) in their areas of residence. As well, the delivery model should include a social forum to respond to emotional needs and to help rebuild self-confidence and address important concerns of mature job seekers. The tool should be bilingual to ensure that English-speaking and French-speaking workers are able to access it. Upon the creation of the tool, it will be essential to raise its visibility among potential users, including employers, employment service providers, recruitment agencies and mature workers. This step can be achieved via a mass marketing campaign using traditional and social media.

- b) Forum on LinkedIn dedicated to 45 plus:

Another option to address the lack of knowledge about the available resources and the need to liaise and consult with fellow job seekers is to create a distinct LinkedIn group for individuals aged 45 and over. Such a forum would represent a social and a professional forum simultaneously.

- c) Information sessions and workshops for mature workers:

The NDG Seniors Citizens Council (NDGSCC) will be offering a free lunchtime workshop entitled “Understanding Discrimination against Mature Workers, Rights and Resources” in the fall of 2012.

CEDEC

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