

## Flexibility the key to engagement of mature workers

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In the *Daily Telegraph* earlier this week, it was reported that older workers are being ‘forced’ to stay in their jobs past 65 because they don’t have enough saved to retire.

Yet SageCo, a specialist agency which partners with organisations to address the risks, challenges and opportunities of an ageing workforce, has data which flies in the face of a resentful, longing-to-retire older workforce.

Speaking to *Human Capital*, Alison Monroe, managing director at SageCo, said data assembled from the opinions of 2,500 aged 50+ workers indicated that older employees want to stay employed, but under flexible working conditions.

Monroe said that overwhelmingly, their studies have shown that if older workers feel valued, they generally want to remain employed either on a full-time non-fixed hour working week, part-time or under other flexible work scenarios.

On their 2010/2011 data, Monroe said 81% stated they would continue to work, if they could work differently. “The problem is that the conversation is not taking place,” she added.

Monroe said it is integral for leaders to be talking to the mature members of the team, and gauging their future work intentions, not their ‘retirement intentions’, which sends the wrong message to the older workforce.

With some 300,000 Australians past the age of 65 in the workforce, Monroe said there are many things employers can do to specifically enhance engagement among older workers, namely:

- 1. Have ‘the conversation’:** It’s important to equip leaders with skills and capabilities to have conversations with older workers about their career path intentions. There is a fear amongst leaders about addressing the topic, but it’s important to stressing future working intentions, not retirement. These conversations should be taking place regardless of age.
- 2. Improve flexibility:** Flexibility means something different according to each individual. 49% would be happy to work full-time hours but want more autonomy on how that will play out. For example, 38 hours constructed in a different way. 59% want to work part-time or part-year. For example, 3-6 months in the peak time period. There is also a lot of interest in mobile work options, so this should be investigated.
- 3. Look at job re-design:** Working differently doesn’t just refer to working hours. Older workers really want to focus in on their areas of expertise. They may want to get back into their original areas of interest, ie. Why they went into particular lines of work in the first place.

**4. Share their skills:** SageCo said it has discovered that the older generation wants to have opportunities to share their skills, experience and knowledge. Ways to do so do not have to be complex, and can be very simple. For example, a knowledge sharing breakfast. Or, simply putting 10 minutes on the agenda for specific input at meetings. Some simple knowledge sharing techniques can really help engagement levels.

**5. Have processes to assist transitions:** Employers know that employees are overwhelmingly underprepared for retirement. Organisations should invest time in helping to plan and act on issues relating to transition. Specific focus areas include, career direction and development, health and wellbeing, improving financial literacy and a work/life plan.