

Workplace interventions to support an aging workforce

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My background

- Organizational psychologist
- Public sector personnel selection
- Portland State University (1994-2018)
- University of Limerick, Ireland (2018-present)
- Associate editor, *Work, Aging and Retirement*; special issue editor, *Personnel Psychology*, on age at work.
- Intervention research: Worker wellbeing and work ability; job applicants; green behaviors at work



Overview

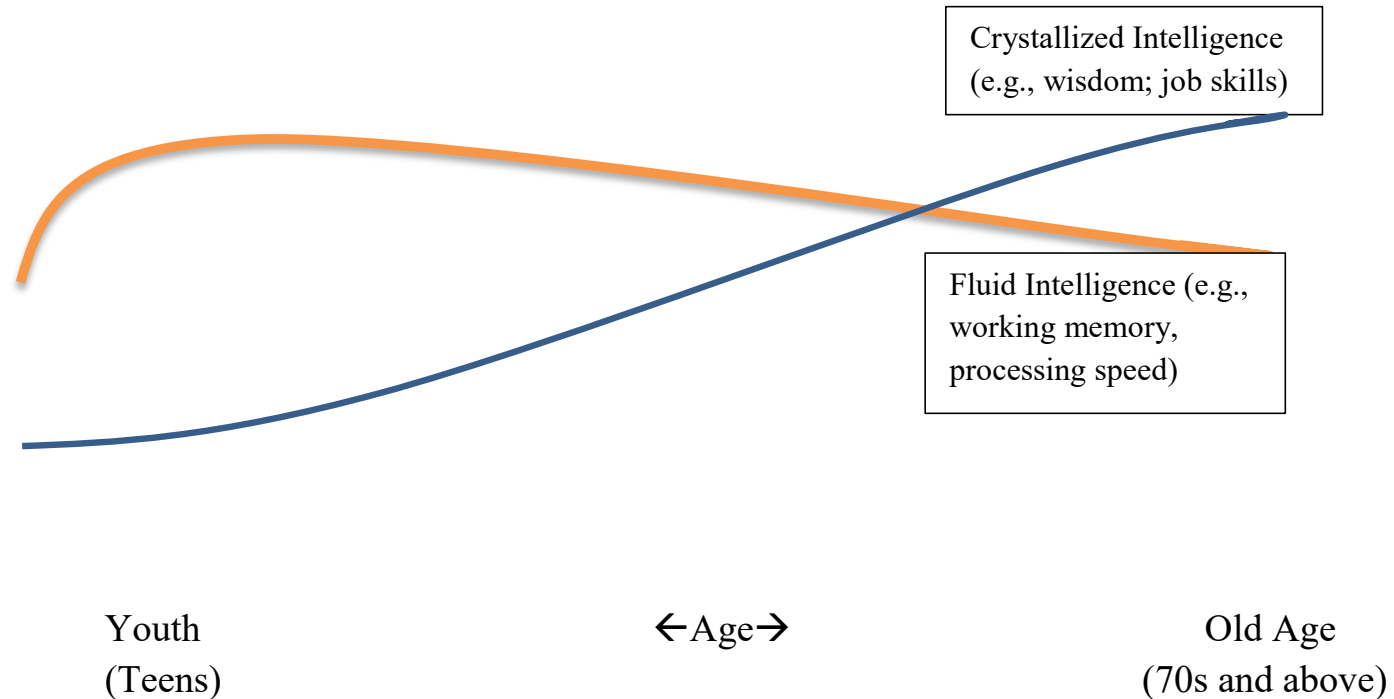
- Changes associated with aging
- Examples of workplace interventions to address age issues
- Best practices and lessons for developing effective workplace interventions

Age-related changes

Physical changes

- Examples: Changes in health, strength, endurance

Cognitive changes



Personality changes

Increases in:

- Conscientiousness
- Agreeableness
- Emotional stability

Job attitudes and performance

- Positive job attitudes with age, e.g., job satisfaction
- Few age differences in overall job performance, but small improvements:
 - Increased organizational citizenship
 - Increased safety behavior
 - Decreased counterproductive work behavior

Work motivation

- Increased intrinsic work motives such as
 - meaningfulness of work
 - work itself
 - relationships
- Increased generativity motives – giving back to next generation

Using workplace interventions to help adapt
to these changes

What do we mean by a workplace intervention?

- Change an organization or supervisor can actually bring about such as
 - redesign of work, supervisor training, employee training
- To benefit
 - individuals (e.g., behavior, health)
 - team (e.g., culture)
 - organization (e.g., productivity)

Anger, W. K., Elliot, D. L., Bodner, T., Olson, R., Rohlman, D. S., Truxillo, D. M., Kuehl, K. S., Hammer, L. B., & Montgomery, D. (2015). Effectiveness of total worker health interventions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 20*, 226-247.

Examples of interventions to support older
workers
(and some lessons learned)

“Lifestyle” intervention

- Sample: 730 Dutch hospital staff over 45 years old
- Measures at baseline, 6 months, 12 months (vitality, work engagement, productivity, sick leave)
- 2 conditions
 - Weekly yoga, workout, aerobic exercise, lifestyle coaching for goal setting, feedback, and problem solving strategies.
 - Control – none of the above.
- Results: Intervention only effective (increased feelings of vitality) for those who actually took part in the yoga
- Lesson: Uptake/compliance issue – it worked for those people who actually took advantage of it

Strijk et al. (2013) *Scandinavian J. of Work and Env. Health*

Workplace redesign: BMW

- Sample: Aging production line workers
- Intervention: Physical redesign: Wooden flooring, new footwear, work stations that could be adjusted for an individual employee's height; ergonomic chairs; strength and stretching exercises in the work day; easy tool grips.
- Results: New production line increased productivity by 7%.
- Lesson: Developed with stakeholders: employees along with managers and technical experts to solve a specific problem.

Workplace redesign: L.L. Bean

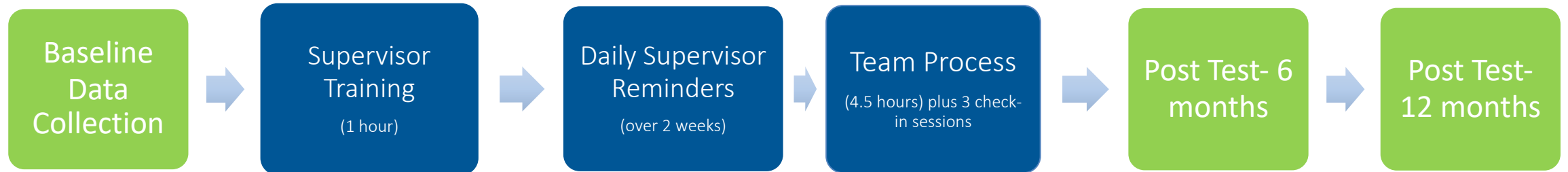
- Sample: Older warehouse workers facing health and safety risks
- Intervention: Technological redesign – robotics and other technology to help with lifting – combined with a fitness program
- Results:
 - Cost-avoidance of over 3 USD for each dollar spent on the program
 - Younger workers valued it as well.
- Lessons:
 - Changes benefited not only older workers, but younger workers as well
 - Support for younger workers before a physical problem develops

Team processes intervention: Safety and Health Improvement Program (SHIP; 2011-2016)

- Sample older construction workers - a vulnerable population
- Public sector organization in the U.S. (N=500+)
 - Mean age 44, many over 50
 - High rates of high BMI, high blood pressure
- Developed with input from employees, management, unions
- Intervention:
 - a. Online supervisor training about how to support employees and foster safety (1 hour)
 - b. Remind the supervisors daily via smart phone to apply what they learned (2 weeks)
 - c. Group process – 4.5 hours with facilitator to improve team processes, plus regular follow up meetings

Hammer, L. B. (PI), Truxillo, D. M. (PI), & Bodner, T. *Team-Based Work-Life and Safety Intervention for Construction Workers: Supervisor Skills Translational Project*. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). (See Oregon Healthy Workforce Center)

SHIP Intervention: Rollout Schedule and Evaluation Design

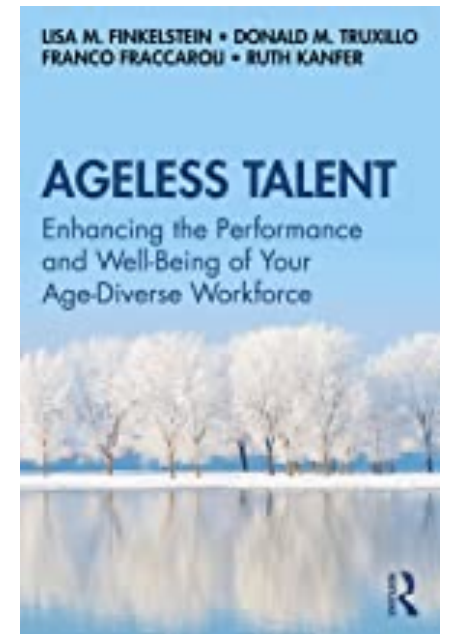


SHIP Intervention Outcomes

- Blood pressure significantly lower in intervention teams
- Most benefit for workers with poor relationships with their boss and coworkers:
 - Improved perceived work crew effectiveness
 - Improved work-life balance
- Lessons:
 - Based on past research
 - Involvement of employees and supervisors at all levels
 - Support from the top
 - Understand when and for whom an intervention works
- Subsequently, developed a shortened, “wise” intervention (brief) version available online to increase dissemination among employers
- This and other interventions available at Oregon Health Workforce Center website:
- <https://www.ohsu.edu/oregon-healthy-workforce-center/safety-health-improvement-program>

Ageless Talent: Tailoring age interventions for multi-age workforce

- Based on current science
- Must tailor interventions for different people and situations
- Interventions can be quite extensive or quite simple – organization-wide, or just supervisor-led
- Support for issues such as:
 - Motivation
 - Engagement
 - Training
 - Teamwork
 - Work-life balance and well-being
 - Talent management
- PIERA Framework:
 - Planning>Implementation>Evaluation>Reflection>Adjustment



Finkelstein, Truxillo, Fraccaroli, & Kanfer (2021). *Ageless Talent*. Routledge.

Summary of intervention lessons

- Needs assessment: What are needs to be changed and why
- Is the intervention to address an age-related problem, or to prevent the problem from happening?
- Practical and affordable (so that organization and workers will adopt it)
 - Consider a “wise” intervention (brief, highly focused, simple)

Truxillo, D. M., Cadiz, D. E., & Hammer, L. B. (2015). Supporting the aging workforce: A review and recommendations for workplace intervention research. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 2, 351-381.

Walton (2014); McCarthy, J. M., Bauer, T. N., Truxillo, D. M., Campion, M. C., Van Iddekinge, C. H., & Campion, M. A. (2017). Using pre-test explanations to improve test-taker reactions: Testing a set of “wise” interventions. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 141, 43-56.

Summary of intervention lessons

- Involve stakeholders: employees, supervisors, managers, unions
- Get support from the top
- Promote uptake to make sure people actually use it (incentives; involvement)
- Best to benefit workers of all ages

Summary of intervention lessons

- Evaluate
 - What outcomes are most important? Wellbeing? Performance? Work ability?
 - Did it work? If not, adjust
 - When does it work?
 - For which industries?
 - For whom?

Thank you

Questions?

