Benefits of a Supportive Development Climate for Older Workers

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

As the workforce continues to age and labour and skill shortages become a major concern, the challenge for employers will be to convince older workers to remain in, or return to the labour force. This will require making the workplace more attractive and appealing so that older workers will want to continue working. Learning and development will play a crucial role in making the workplace appealing to older workers and at the same time making older workers attractive to employers. Taking steps to strengthen older workers’ development orientation and providing older workers with a supportive development climate are important in fostering older workers’ commitment and intention to remain.

Warnings of impending labour and skill shortages have been made along with calls for employers to implement policies and practices targeting the recruitment and retention of older workers, but few Canadian employers have developed a strategic response to the aging workforce.

This study aims to test a model of the relationships among older workers’ propensity to engage in development activities (development orientation), their perceptions of the development opportunities associated with their job (job development climate), their commitment to their organization, and their intention to remain with their organization. It asks: what is the extent to which older employees are willing to engage in development activities? What is the extent to which they perceive their job provides them with development opportunities?

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

Francine Schlosser and Marjorie Armstrong-Stassen from the Odette School of Business at the University of Windsor set out to develop and test a model of the relationships among older workers’ development orientation, job development climate, affective commitment and their intention to remain with their organization.

The researchers began by creating a conceptual model to test. They then created separate questionnaires. The first was completed by 395 individuals aged 50 to 70 who were in their career job. The second was completed by 195 individuals aged 50 to 70 who were employed in a bridge job. Both questionnaires included measures of development orientation, job development climate, affective commitment and intention to remain as well as individual characteristics and organizational characteristics.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

The researchers found the following:

• Older workers who had a greater tendency to engage in development activities perceived that their job provided them with more development opportunities. In turn they were more
committed to their organization and intended to remain with their organization more than those who did not.

- Development orientation and job development climate play an important role in the retention of older workers in bridge jobs as well as those in career jobs. The findings suggest that to retain older workers employers need to ensure that older workers’ jobs promote personal development and that their work assignments include adequate opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills.
- Not all older workers will take advantage of development opportunities. Older workers who view work as a very important aspect of their life, who are in full-time jobs, and who financially need to work are more likely to engage in development activities than those who have low work centrality, who are in part-time jobs, and who are not financially dependent on their job.
- Organizational characteristics are associated with the extent to which employers are providing older workers with development opportunities on their job. Older workers were less likely to have access to development opportunities if they were represented by a labour union or professional association.
- Bridge-job respondents were less likely to engage in development opportunities and more likely to perceive their job as offering fewer development opportunities than career-job respondents.

In summary, the findings indicated that development orientation was positively related to job development climate, which, in turn, was positively related to affective commitment, and affective commitment was positively related to intention to remain with the organization.

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Employers may find this research particularly useful. The underlying message, that in order to create a supportive development climate and retain older workers, employers need to foster older workers’ development orientation and ensure that their work assignments provide opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills is vital for employers to know and address.

Researchers may also find this research useful. It provides greater insight into bridge employment and the older workers who participate in this type of employment is clearly needed. Given the expected dependence of employers on older bridge workers in the future, it is important to explore management’s approach to this group of older workers as well as to heighten management’s awareness of how to effectively recruit and retain older bridge workers.

CITATION


KEYWORDS

Older Workers, Training, Employee Development, Workplace Learning
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Learning and development will play a crucial role in making the workplace appealing to older workers and at the same time making older workers attractive to employers. Taking steps to strengthen older workers’ development orientation and providing older workers with a supportive development climate are important in fostering older workers’ commitment and intention to remain.