

What an Aging Workforce Can Teach Us About Workplace Flexibility

MONDAY, JULY 18, 2005 • U.S. CAPITOL

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The absolute and relative growth of the older American population is about to have a profound effect on the worlds of work and retirement. After decades of easing (or pushing) older workers out of the labor force, recent public and private sector initiatives are aimed at encouraging the retention of older workers. Heightened health and well-being among many older Americans are furthering their active engagement in a host of domains, including work.

While the “aging of America” is most often presented as a major problem in need of resolution, a more optimistic view would find there to be a potentially emerging congruence among the interests of older people in working, of employers in having reliable employees, and of government in having pressures eased on Social Security and other public programs.

For this scenario to play out, however, will require major adjustments in the attitudes and behaviors of each of these stakeholders. One such critical adjustment centers on workplace flexibility for older workers. Data make clear that growing numbers of older individuals would like to continue working, although not necessarily on the same employment terms they have traditionally experienced.

It is critical to remember, however, that there is great variation in the interest, ability, and need of different groups of mature workers to maintain an employed status. Thus, while there is a virtual imperative emerging to promote flexible work experiences among older individuals, much attention must be paid to the work-related diversity within this emerging population.

By definition, workplace *flexibility* can and should acknowledge the range of preferences and needs that would encourage growing numbers of older people to remain employed and to do so on terms favorable to both them and their employers. Properly designed, workplace flexibility can help turn many “young retirees” into “older workers.”



The New Politics of Old Age Policy explores the demographic, economic, and political trends that have transformed aging policy over the past four decades. The book provides liberal and conservative perspectives on these new policy dynamics, analyzes underlying changes in the size and make-up of the older population, and shows how these trends are affecting major aging-related programs, notably Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

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