

Managing a healthy ageing workforce is a business imperative announces CIPD study

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The current downturn is camouflaging the fact that the UK faces a severe skills shortage in the coming decades, and businesses must look after their ageing workforce to fill it. This was the conclusion of a year long study conducted jointly by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives.

The study estimates that UK employers will need to fill 13.5 million job vacancies in the next ten years but there will be only 7 million school and college leavers in this period. Immigration won't fill the gap, so employers must look at how they can keep their existing workers for longer.

This may be feasible as more than half of workers aged over 54 plan on working beyond state retirement age. But as bones and limbs age, it's vital that employers provide safe, comfortable working conditions if workers are to remain physically fit and able to ward off retirement.

Optimising the workplace for ageing limbs

By 2020 36 percent of the working population will be over 50. As people age muscles weaken, and as muscles supporting the spine and joints decline the risk of injury increases.

Consequently, to ensure workers can continue performing tasks comfortably into their 60s, it is vital that employers invest in creating ergonomically optimised workplaces.

"Utilizing ergonomic principles can offer many benefits: workers can perform tasks for longer, their productivity improves and the risk of developing a repetitive strain injury is reduced," said Treston Ltd UK Operations Director Tapani Poytaniemi.

Ergonomics can reduce the risk of absenteeism and early retirement from RSI

The Health and Safety Executive estimates that 2.8 million working days are lost in the UK every year due to RSI, mainly in the upper limbs and neck.

"Repetitive strain injury is arguably the biggest threat to the ability of employers to hold on to their most valuable workers," said Tapani, "With the skills gap widening, it's vital employers do everything they can to prevent workers developing RSIs."

One solution to these problems consists in dynamic ways of working: Employees who use infinitely height-adjustable sitting/standing desks can move their bodies while they work, helping to strengthen their muscles. Tapani points out that Treston has harnessed this knowledge in its furniture solutions: "Both the height and the angle of our workbenches (<http://www.trestonltd.co.uk>) and desks can be adjusted, while our shelving, which can be adapted to suit individual needs, also offers the option of varying depths. All this helps keep employees mobile." The company is happy to create and produce individual ergonomic solutions upon customer request.

Poor lighting costs productivity

Light is another key factor in optimising workplaces for an ageing workforce. Poor quality, flickering lights cause eye strain and tiredness, whereas light levels of 2000 lux can improve productivity 15-20% and reduce task rejects by 29%.

“With our workforce ageing, high quality lighting is vital,” said Tapani, “Treston provides powerful task lights (<http://www.trestonltd.co.uk>) with an attached magnifying glass which are ideal for looking after aging eyes and helping workers to perform tasks productively for longer.”

Building the ergonomic workplace is vital for Britain’s economic and industrial health

The CIPD study highlights the responsibility UK businesses now have to look after the physical wellbeing of an aging workforce, both for practical and economic reasons.

Along with adjustable industrial furniture (<http://www.trestonltd.co.uk>) and high quality lighting, businesses need to provide workers with regular refresher courses in ergonomic working practices and free health checks. This will ensure UK businesses can keep hold of their most experienced, valuable staff for longer and plug the approaching skills gap in the UK workforce.

About Treston

Treston is one of the leading European manufacturers of warehouse and handling systems and industrial furniture. The company places great importance on combining ergonomics and design. Treston’s headquarters are in Finland and its UK subsidiary is located in Newbury. The Group has further subsidiaries in Sweden, Norway, Germany and Poland and operates sales offices in the Netherlands and China.

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