

Older Workers More Willing Than Young to Accept Change, Says New Study

March 11, 2005 - Older workers are more inclined and interested in making changes to benefit the organization than younger workers, says a researcher at Louisiana State University.

Conventional wisdom says that technology is the province to the young and that older workers are negatively affected by constant changes in the computerization of business functions.

These stereotypes about aging employees are simply not true and prevent companies from benefiting from their knowledge and experience, says Dr. Tracey Rizzuto, assistant professor of psychology.

“There is some research that shows older workers may not be as quick in learning new technology skills as younger people, but this study shows the commitment and willingness to learn is stronger among the older workers,” Rizzuto said.

Workers are getting older and within five years 20 percent of the workforce will be more than 55, says the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

When the state of Pennsylvania three years ago upgraded its computer systems to streamline and standardize key business processes, Rizzuto wondered how older workers would fare in adapting to the new technology.

Concentrating on the state’s purchasing agents’ willingness to learn the new systems as well as their motivation, commitment and satisfaction in accepting the changes, Rizzuto found plenty of reasons to dispel some of the myths about older workers. Of more than 360 people surveyed, nearly 60 percent were 46 or older and 11 percent were over 55.

workers. “Sometimes the news is not in the expected, but lies in the unexpected.”

Veteran employees were more “fired up” about the changes, Rizzuto observed, adding that most, though not all, were supportive of the new systems.

She will be presenting her findings at the 20th annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology April 15-17 in Los Angeles.

“While there may be some isolated examples of an older worker being resistant to change, this study suggests that is not typical of most older workers surveyed,” she said. Older workers saw the value of the changes and felt an obligation and loyalty to their co-workers to learn and implement the new technology.

She suggested that companies provide specialized training programs for older workers to keep them current with new technological procedures.

“It’s a small price to pay to retain a valuable segment of the workforce who are teachable and adaptable and who will greatly benefit the organization,” she added.

Another plus: older workers tend to feel more devoted to organizational initiatives and share similar values. Therefore, they are more likely to stay with the company rather than change careers as their younger counterparts are more prone to do.

The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) is an international group of 6,000 industrial-organizational psychologists whose members study and apply scientific principles concerning people in the workplace. For more information about SIOP, including Media Resources, which lists nearly 2,000 experts in more than 100 topic areas, visit <http://www.siop.org>

From April 15-17, SIOP will be holding its annual meeting in Los Angeles, CA. More than 3,000 top workplace scientists and practitioners will attend and make some 800 presentations on emerging trends, developments and the way people function in the workplace.

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