

Future Work Scenarios

I~Work Document 16-1



Background

These scenarios are designed to trigger ideas and/or to be used as suggestions for developing notional solutions for the future of work where the workforce is ageing. There are potential legal implications for targeting of people in specific age groups. However, for the purposes of this exercise the restrictions of age discrimination legislation will be (conveniently) ignored. This is not because we are trying to be unethical, just that we want you to be as unconstrained as possible during the research process.

Scenario 1: Labour Market Demands

You are the manager of Casino Cambridge, a large entertainment establishment on the outskirts of Cambridge. You have over 200 employees in a variety of roles. For this exercise you are recruiting Croupier and Floor Management staff. You wish to train and retain high quality people. The Croupiers may need good dexterity and eyesight and a quick mind. The managers need to have an eye for detail and excellent interpersonal skills. Consider what your organisation can do to attract and retain a range of staff including some highly experienced (older) staff. It may be helpful to consider the type of customers that you are aiming to attract.

Scenario 2: Demographic Change

Don't-do-it-Yourself (DDIY) supplies skilled workers for home maintenance (painting, decorating, plumbing etc.). DDIY started in 2007 and expanded rapidly by employing skilled staff from the new Eastern EU countries. It is now 2011 and the economies in the East of the EU are buoyant and many of the migrant workers are returning to their countries of origin to fill the labour shortages there. It is becoming more and more difficult to recruit skilled migrant labour to fulfil your strong order book. This efflux of younger migrant workers has accelerated the demographic age profile in the country – people over 50 years of age are in the majority. Consider how you might turn to the (ageing) indigenous population to fill the labour shortfall.

Scenario 3: Design of the Work and Work Environment

In 2010, electronic publishing through the internet is the predominant way of distributing electronic journals. Cambridge University has set-up a company to publish the results of its own and its partner's research. One of the key corporate aims of the company is to maintain rigorous quality control of both the published data and the presentation of the work. For this, the company is reliant on an editorial staff (employees) supported by peer reviewers (un paid). Editorial experience is a key factor in maintaining quality and many of the editors are highly experienced (older) people. The company is about to upgrade its technology platform from what is effectively a manual system to an integrated internet centric portal – there is the potential to alienate some staff through the introduction of a technology barrier; however there is also the potential to use the technology to facilitate new working practices. Consider how the technology could be used to inhibit and liberate through the redesign of the work and the work environment, with particular reference to older workers.

Scenario 4: Design of Work Tasks & Working Arrangements

You are the Director of Human Resources for the Thames & Trent Ambulance NHS Trust Board. Absenteeism and reported sickness has been rising for a number of years, primarily due to back injuries among long-serving paramedics. How can the work be made more inclusive to (a) help prevent such back pain occurring in the first instance (through, for example, changes in the working environment or a job rotation scheme) and/ or (b) to assist paramedics who can no longer carry on with their current job to move into other areas of work at a time when they might be in their late 40s or older? The Trust is aware of these structural problems and is considering suitable options, drawing on external support.

Scenario 5: Design of Tools and Equipment

As the regional Health, Safety & Environmental Manager for a leading utilities provider – GasConCo – your job is to ensure adherence to best practices, along with the development of company policies, procedures and security issues. In some high security areas within your firm, staff need to put on heavy equipment for their own safety. Ageing workers, as other groups, may find this job too physically demanding after long years in post. Yet they are reluctant to take up alternative jobs within the same company since salaries are lower and this would negatively impact on their final salary scheme. Part-time work is also seen as unattractive, due to lower wages. Your experience is that workers are continuing in post regardless, potentially risking early retirement on health grounds. To make matters worse, there are currently not enough staff to replace ageing workers as there have been difficulties recruiting new staff into the organisation. The company is aware of the problem and is trying to find a suitable solution in discussions with stakeholders.

Scenario 6: Work adaptations, costs & benefits

Your mid-sized IT software consultancy firm, DynamoCo, employs a highly-experienced and valued Software Programmer in his 50s. He has recently returned to work after a hospital operation to tackle his spinal cancer. But the operation has left him paralysed from the waist down. As the Chief Executive, you are concerned over the costs of adapting the work place to meet his needs. What aspects of the working environment (office, furniture, team support, equipment etc) can be adapted to his needs? What is the business case for these adaptations? Is there a broader business case for retaining his services?

Scenario 7: Design of Work Systems & Environment

You're the Director of a major division within a Government department which is committed to equal opportunities and the employment of an age diverse staff. The department is undergoing structural reorganisation and your division's responsibilities have increased in size and scope. New productivity measures are being introduced to improve the output of staff. You have also been informed that there is a slim chance that your division will be relocating to another part of the country. This combination of change is likely to lead to large-scale departures, especially among experienced, long-serving staff who are approaching retirement age. A typical case is that of Sarah, the R & D manager who has balanced her work with caring responsibilities of her 84-year-old mother. However, with these changes Sarah feels this finely tuned balance may be disrupted.

- Can Sarah take a more flexible role to manage her work and caring responsibilities?
- What changes can Sarah's employers make to accommodate her work/life balance?
- Is there a business case for retaining Sarah, possibly on a part-time basis?

Scenario 8: Design of Work Systems & Environment

Sue is graphic designer who works for a small specialist organisation, ArtConto Works. She is in her late 50's and is recovering from a car accident in which she had to have her lower left

leg amputated. Sue now walks with the aid of crutches, although sometimes she has to use a wheelchair. The organisation Sue works for is based in a listed building with no lift access. Sue's Department is on the third floor. Currently, Sue is working from home but would very much like to return to the office environment. Sue can perform the majority of her tasks, yet has noticed that recently she has not been invited to present to clients.

- Should the company move Sue's department to the ground floor?
- What other changes can Sue's employers make to accommodate her needs in the office?
- Does it make economic sense for ArtConto Works to make changes to accommodate Sue's needs?
- Does it make more economic sense to re-design Sue's job opposed to workplace?
- Should Sue take 'early retirement'?

Scenario 9: Design of Work Systems & Environment

Alex is an engineering consultant and is often required to travel extensively for work. At 61, Alex is finding long distance travel is becoming more tiring. Alex often has to work on planes and in hotel rooms that may not be ergonomically suitable. In addition, Alex often works in clients' offices that are noisy and hectic. Alex has noticed that sometimes hearing what people are saying can be difficult. Alex has considered retiring but does enjoy work and has been asked to stay on by employers due to Alex's extensive knowledge and excellent client base. Ideally, Alex would like to take a part-time role that does not involve so much travel.

- Can the company Alex works for install equipment so that some client contact can be conducted via web cam?
- Is there a business case for cutting down the number of overseas meetings Alex has to attend?
- How can Alex's employers capture Alex's knowledge in this field, and the extensive client relationships Alex has built up, to accommodate Alex's desire to work part-time.