

Demographic change in occupational groups

Working conditions and health of the generation 50plus

Factsheet 05 has already addressed the topic of demographic change in the world of work. It focuses on the frequency of physical working conditions at workplaces of various levels of requirement depending on age. Furthermore, occupational risks can be explained by work content and work organisation of different occupational groups (Vendramin & Valenduc 2014). The present article uses data from the BIBB/BAuA 2012 Employment Survey to analyse mental demands at work and health aspects for older employees (50-64 years) in several occupational groups and compares these with those of employees in the middle age (30-49 years).

Occupational structure of the generation 50plus

Five occupational groups were used to examine the occupational structure based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) and in line with Vendramin and Valenduc (2014):

Tab. 1: Examples of occupation for the created occupational groups

Occupational group	Examples
Managers and professionals	Engineering professionals, teaching professionals, business professionals, managing directors and chief executives
Technicians and high-skilled associate professionals	Physical and engineering science technicians, health associate professionals
Service occupations (mid-skilled)	Office and keyboard clerks, sales workers
Manual occupations (mid-skilled)	Skilled agricultural workers, metal workers, drivers and mobile plant operators
Low-skilled occupations	Cleaners, labourers

The occupational structure of persons aged 50 and over, as examined using the five categories, does not differ from that of middle-aged employees (30-49 years). The two age groups are distributed almost evenly across the occupational groups (about 20% in each), with the exception of the low-skilled sector (8%). Likewise, no notable age differences can be reported with regard to full-/part-time employment. The age composition of employees in the individual occupational groups shows that the proportion of older people is greatest in low-skilled occupations (35%) and somewhat lower in the other occupational groups, at around 30%. In addition, it is apparent that, across both age groups, women are represented considerably more often than men in low-skilled occupations and service occupations (almost 70% in each case) and considerably less in manual occupations (approx. 10%) and in managerial positions and professional occupations (about 40%). This also corresponds to the distribution of men and women aged 50-64 according to occupational groups (Fig. 1).

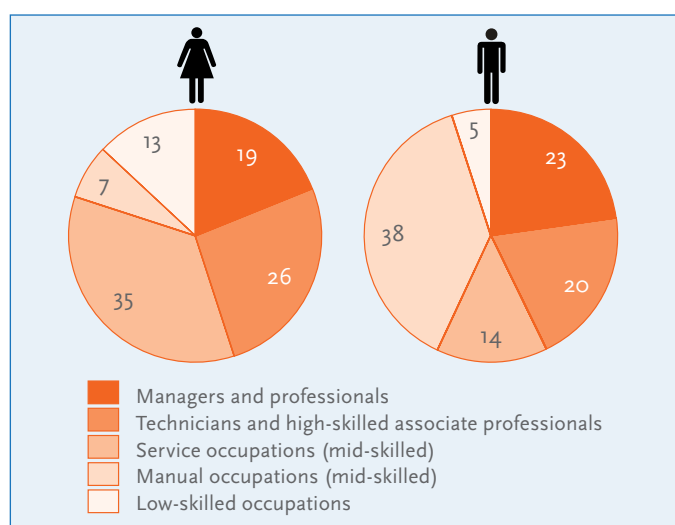


Fig. 1: Occupational structure of the generation 50plus according to gender (in %)

Mental working conditions in the occupations

The employees were asked about the frequency of mental working conditions in their occupation (Fig. 2). The responses show that, over all ages, managers and professionals perceive the greatest deadline pressure and pressure to perform (30-49 years: 63%; 50-64 years: 60%). In service occupations (30-49 years: 49%; 50-64 years: 43%) and manual occupations (30-49 years: 55%; 50-64 years: 50%), this requirement is reported more rarely by those aged 50 or over than by younger workers; in low-skilled occupations, on the other hand, it is mentioned more often (30-49 years: 32%; 50-64 years: 39%). Managers and professionals are faced with new tasks more rarely as their age increases (30-49 years: 62%; 50-64 years: 54%). The age effect is similar with regard to multitasking, i.e. performing several activities at the same time: older employees report this work requirement less frequently in both high-skilled associate professional occupations (30-49 years: 72%; 50-64 years: 66%)

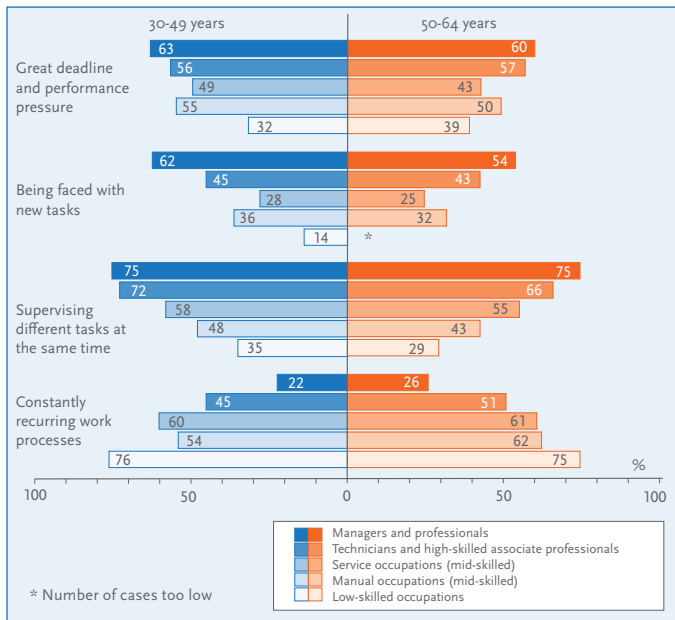


Fig. 2: Proportion of respondents that report frequently being exposed to these mental working conditions in their occupation (in %)

and low-skilled occupations (30-49 years: 35%; 50-64 years: 29%). Constantly recurring work processes appear to increase with age. This is seen in particular in high-skilled associate professional occupations (30-49 years: 45%; 50-64 years: 51%) and manual occupations (30-49 years: 54%; 50-64 years: 62%). This work requirement can be found most frequently in low-skilled occupations (76%), however, there is no major difference between age groups.

Working until retirement age

The need to work longer for demographic reasons can only be met if work ability is maintained in old age. To this end, it is important to adapt working conditions to ageing workforces in order to allow healthy ageing in working life.

Self-assessed state of health is more often described as (rather) poor by older workers. Considering occupational affiliation, it is striking that health in both age groups is perceived as poorer as the level of qualification decreases. This pattern is also seen in relation to physical complaints. Employees were asked about musculoskeletal complaints (e.g. pain in the lower back) that had occurred in connection with their work within the last 12 months.

The results clarify that, regardless of occupational affiliation, older employees report more often three or more complaint symp-

toms than those in the middle age. These complaints increase as the qualification level decreases. With respect to psychovegetative symptoms (e.g. physical exhaustion), no significant differences emerged between the occupational or age groups.

Furthermore, remaining in working life for longer depends on motivation and willingness of employees. The following results make obvious how older employees (50-64 years) are thinking about it: almost two thirds would like to retire early; about a quarter would like to work until the regular retirement age, and only a small number (6%) would like to work beyond it – a pattern of opinion that is common to all of the occupational groups. Two groups stand out here: employees in manual occupations and managers and professionals. The number of respondents that said they want to leave working life early was considerably higher in the former group (73%) than in the latter (11%).

Summary

The heterogeneity of the generation 50plus is reflected in the occupational structure. One striking feature is the apparent tendency for a greater number of older employees to remain in low-skilled occupations.

Furthermore, it becomes evident that, for both age groups, work intensity appears to increase and monotony appears to decrease as the occupations' qualification level increases. Overall, however, the results show that mental demands in the workplace vary on a job-specific basis and only partly due to age. Frequent musculoskeletal complaints at work increase with age and as the qualification level decreases. The situation therefore appears to be especially unfavourable for low-skilled, older workers. In combination with the finding that, in all five of the occupational groups examined, about a quarter of participating employees would like to work until regular retirement age, this highlights the importance of, above all, health-promoting/health-maintaining measures for longer working life. At the same time, workplace health promotion should be oriented towards different activity profiles and levels of requirement of employees in the respective occupational groups.

Would you like to find out more?

You can read more about this topic in the brochure "Arbeitsfähigkeit erhalten und fördern" [Maintaining and promoting working capacity] from the Initiative New Quality of Work (INQA): www.inqa.de/DE/Angebote/Publikationen/arbeitsfaehigkeit-erhalten-foerdern.html. The working paper by Vendramin & Valenduc (2014) is available here: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2512679>.

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