



ENWHP Briefings

No. 4

Ageing Workforce – growing grey productively

Demographic developments are posing new challenges for enterprises and the social security systems in Europe. Over the next few decades there will be a marked increase in the proportion of elderly people in employment and the proportion of younger employees will decrease significantly. Whereas nowadays employees over 45 years of age are often perceived as being only fit for the scrap heap, they will soon represent the major part of the workforce. At the same time, Europe's enterprises will need to depend in future more than ever before on qualified, motivated and especially on healthy employees. And if the social security systems on the European continent are to continue to function economically, they will have to rely on employees being able to remain longer in gainful employment. The health, pension and accident insurance funds can only be financed on the long-term with healthy employees.

New strategies will be essential to help integrate employees in the work process for a longer period of time and to make better use of the potential offered by elderly employees. Evidence available from scientific research has shown that ageing does not necessarily mean a diminishing ability to work. A good example is provided by the many managers who usually belong to the highest age group in companies. Despite being under pressure to achieve and having to work long hours, their state of health is often very good and as a rule they cope better with the ageing process than for example production line workers. This can be attributed to the changes that take place over a person's life span in their abilities and skills. Ageing does not necessarily mean a reduction but an alteration in their skills:

- there is a decline in physical capacities,
- mental capacities remain the same, and
- intellectual and social skills increase,
- hearing and seeing abilities also diminish and – as long as the requirements remain the same – need to be compensated with increased effort.

Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) helps to maintain elderly employees' ability to perform and helps to prepare both employees and enterprises for the demographic challenge. Since the end of 2004, as part of its 5th initiative, ENWHP deals with the development and dissemination of WHP strategies and initiatives that enable employees to remain in gainful employment for a longer period of time.